Yuri Kitayama
Illustrator • Riv
25
Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles
Our Hero

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"WE'RE GOING TO SUMMON HIM HERE."
Miharu nodded smugly, grinning from ear to ear.

Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles

Rio focused on activating the transcendent powers of erasure.
AISHIA!
YUP.

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Rio (Haruto Amakawa)

The main character of this series who reincarnated as an orphan of the Beltrum Kingdom. Awakened as the transcendent one named the "Dragon King" after a deadly battle with a hero and was erased from everyone's memories. In his previous life, he was a Japanese university student named Amakawa Haruto.

Aishia

Rio's contract spirit who calls him Haruto. A spirit whose true identity is the artificial creation of the Wise God Lina.

Celia Claire

Noblewoman from the Beltrum Kingdom. A genius sorcerer and Rio's former academy teacher.

Latifa

A werefox girl from the spirit folk village. In her previous life, she was an elementary school student named Endo Suzune.

Sara

A silver werewolf girl from the spirit folk village. Currently in the Galarc Kingdom with Miharu.

Alma

An elder dwarf girl from the spirit folk village. Currently in the Galarc Kingdom with Miharu.

Orphia

A high elf girl from the spirit folk village. Currently in the Galarc Kingdom with Miharu.

Ayase Miharu

A high school student from another world. Haruto's childhood friend and first love.

Sendo Aki

A middle school student from another world. Was repenting for her mistake with her older brother Takahisa, but...

Sendo Masato

An elementary school student from another world. Awakened as a hero after Saint Erica's death.

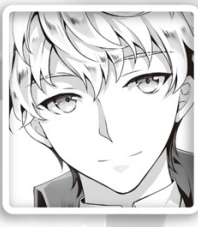
CHARACTER INTRODUCTION

Flora Beltrum
Second Princess of the Beltrum Kingdom. Currently with her older sister Christina.

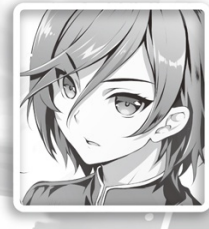
Christina Beltrum
First Princess of the Beltrum Kingdom. Escaped her home nation to oppose the Arbor faction.

Sendo Takahisa
Aki and Masato's brother from their original world. Currently the hero of the Centostella Kingdom.

Sakata Hiroaki
A hero from another world. Operates with the support of Duke Huguenot.



Shigekura Rui
A high school student from another world. The hero of the Beltrum Kingdom.

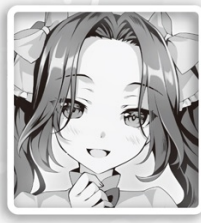


Kikuchi Renji
One of the heroes from another world. An adventurer unaffiliated with any kingdom, until...

Liselotte Cretia
Noblewoman from the Galarc Kingdom and president of the Ricca Guild. She was a high school student named Minamoto Rikka in her past life.

Sora
Rio's disciple from the life before his past life. Serves Rio after he awakened as the Dragon King.

Sumeragi Satsuki
Miharu's friend from their original world. Currently the hero of the Galarc Kingdom.



Charlotte Galarc
Second Princess of the Galarc Kingdom. Once showed strong affection towards Haruto.

Reiss
A mysterious man pulling the strings behind the scenes. Wary of Rio for always disrupting his plans.

Sakuraba Erika
The woman who caused a revolution in a minor nation. Fulfilled her wish after her battle with Rio and died.

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Prologue: Preparations

Immediately after the Divine War ended—that is, a thousand years before the modern era which Rio lived in and somewhere in eastern Strahl, a woman with extremely elegant features stood alone in an uninhabited wasteland. She looked frail enough to be blown away by a gust of wind, and appeared to be no older than twenty.

“This should be the spot.” She looked around the area with certainty.

She seemed to have come to the uninhabited wasteland with a clear purpose, but she didn’t appear to be a traveler of sorts. She was wearing a casual dress, as though she was out on a stroll through the neighborhood. She didn’t have any belongings on her.

“Ugh...”

The woman staggered, mouth twisting in pain. She had a hand pressed down against her abdomen, and her face was as pale as a ghost. She looked like she was in so much agony that she could faint at any moment.

But the woman clenched her teeth and mustered all her strength. She had something she had to do first.

I’m sorry. There’s no time. He’s going to die before I can copy everything over. I have to leave everything to you, one thousand years in the future.

Those were the words she had uttered just before coming here. She had said them to Aishia, the humanoid spirit girl who would travel with Rio in the future.

The woman—Lina—would do everything she could to prepare for the future to come in one thousand years. Even if she had lost her power to see into the future, even if the otherworld powers had placed her in a state of certain death...

I will use the little of my remaining lifespan to do everything I can.

Lina looked up at the blue sky over her head with renewed determination.

My battle begins here...

Despite her awareness of how little time she had left, Lina beamed with satisfaction, then lowered her gaze to the land she stood on.

It was the spot where the Galarc Castle would stand in the future.

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Chapter 1: The Seventh Wise God

Year 1000 of the Holy Era.

Early in the morning, when the sky was still dim, a huge pillar of fire rose from the red-light district of the capital of Galarc. It was the flame Sendo Takahisa had released to burn down the brothel. The fire was so fierce, it was visible from the castle, and it created a commotion as people wondered what was going on.

Satsuki and the others in the mansion were also roused from their sleep and rushed outside in a hurry. The pillar of fire could be seen from the garden, where Celia, Latifa, Sara, Orphia, Alma, Satsuki, Aki, Masato, Charlotte, Komomo, Gouki, and Kayoko had gathered. They were accompanied by Gouki's servants —including Sayo and her brother, Shin—and Charlotte's personal knights, as well as Celia's mother, Monica, and Liselotte, who just so happened to be staying overnight. Miharu was the only one who wasn't with them.

The entire group held their breaths as they watched the pillar of fire. The flames eventually died away and disappeared from view, but the silence lingered after.

They were all thinking the same thing: it couldn't have been a natural phenomenon, as any normal fire couldn't burn all the way up to the sky as this had. Thus, it had to be an artificial flame.

However, there was a limit to how large a man-made fire could get. Magic that could create a flame this large generally didn't exist in modern Strahl, and producing something of this scale with spirit arts would be absurd. It would take someone with an enormous amount of latent power to do so—and there was only a select number of people who fulfilled that condition.

"H-Hey, that fire just now..." Masato said hesitantly.

Do you think it was my brother controlling it?

The question of whether Takahisa—who had sneaked out of the castle and vanished—was the culprit behind the phenomenon was on the tip of his tongue, before he swallowed it back down.

What was he trying to burn with a fire like that? Why would he do such a thing? Just the thought of it was terrifying.

“H-Hey, where’d Miharu go?!”

In an attempt to shake off the bad feeling she had, Aki glanced around at her surroundings in search of Miharu. Although they weren’t related by blood, she sought the comfort of the girl she adored like an older sister, but Miharu was nowhere to be seen.

“Wha...?!”

A vast amount of magic essence suddenly appeared in the sky above the castle. The scene was comparable to the shock wave of a bomb radiating from the sky—the air shook with the pressure of the essence, and those who could detect it quickly prepared themselves for battle with panicked expressions on their faces.

“A spirit aura?!”

Sara, Orphia, and Alma all whirled around to look at a corner of the garden. Their contract spirits had probably informed them that a spirit had appeared nearby. Sure enough, Aisha stood where they were looking. She was wearing one of the masks that allowed her to evade the restrictions of a transcendent one.

“Who is that...?” everyone wondered curiously.

Of course they would: Aisha had become a transcendent one along with Rio, so no one could remember her.

Aishia?! Why did you materialize... Never mind. I can see the situation calls for it.

The only exception was Celia, who the rules of god didn’t apply to for some reason. She could remember both Rio and Aishia clearly.

“Everyone, run!” Aishia yelled, flying into the air. Her normally emotionless voice was filled with a strong sense of urgency. “Everyone, we have to get out of here! Hurry...!”

Run now, was what Celia was about to say when she spotted Miharu making her way out the entrance of the mansion.

“Miharu, this way!” Celia shouted.

Her yells drew the attention of the others in the garden, who all looked to Miharu as well. However, Miharu appeared to be half asleep, eyes unfocused as she trudged forward. The sight of her like that made Celia run over in concern. But Miharu merely came to a stop and gazed up at the pressure in the air illuminated by the sunrise.

What’s wrong, Miharu?! Celia drew closer to her.

“*Assumo*,” Miharu said.

“Huh?” Celia doubted her ears; that word was the same as the start of the

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ancient magic spell she had obtained just recently.

"*Exemplar: Septimum Caelum Vel Persona*."

I knew it! But...

After hearing the rest of Miharu's words, Celia was convinced, but confused. It was slightly different from the ancient magic spell she had obtained, and Miharu had never obtained any ancient magic spells.

Did that mean this wasn't the work of an ancient magic spell, but an artifact with sorcery embedded within it? But if so, when did she obtain such a thing? Either way, the light of the complex spell formula soon enveloped Miharu's body.

"Miharu?!" Satsuki yelled in shock.

But Miharu didn't even spare her a glance as she looked down at her hands as though to confirm something. Then, with a gleeful grin that was unimaginable for her—

"It worked," she mumbled to herself smugly.

Celia was speechless as she stared at her.

Miharu looked up and met her gaze, then smiled.

"Now, it's time to fix the divergent futures," she said in a tone completely unlike her usual self.

◇ ◇ ◇

A short while ago, in the time between the disappearance of the fire pillar in the red-light district and the appearance of the powerful essence source above Galarc Castle.

The ambassador of the Proxia Empire, Reiss Vulfe, was in the sky above the city. He hovered in place while looking down on the Galarc Castle below. Floating beside him was a transparent orb, several dozens of centimeters in diameter.

Reiss placed a hand against the orb and poured his magic essence into it. After a pause, a complex spell formula unfolded around the orb. This meant the orb was some kind of magic artifact.

The precious parting gift of the Wise Gods, the golem. I wanted to analyze how the official owner registration worked before using it in combat, but alas...

Indeed, the ancient artifact Reiss was about to activate was a golem, created by the Seven Wise Gods long in the past. They were an autonomous mobile weapon of war that only obeyed the orders of the owner they were registered to.

However, Reiss was not its official owner. The golem was protected with a spell formula that prevented them from being activated, which he had circumvented to input his own orders.

Of course, activating it this way came with its own problems: the golem couldn't be given any new orders once it was activated. To be more precise, while the golem was activated, any attempts to give it new inputs would be perceived as an enemy attack and trigger a fierce counterattack.

Thus, in order to input new orders, the golem had to be deactivated first. That being said, it wasn't easy for someone who wasn't the owner to deactivate the golem. Golems were the strongest autonomic combat artifacts designed by the Seven Wise Gods for use in the Divine War. The golems couldn't deactivate themselves either, so the only choice was to wait for their internally stored essence to run out or deactivate them by defeating them. However...

I cannot defeat an activated golem in my current state. If I'm going to use this, I must be certain it will bury them. The target are the people in the mansion garden, and the highest priority is Celia Claire, followed by the humanoid spirit. If any other threats appear, those should be eliminated too.

Reiss was prepared to discard the golem after activating it. With Rio and Sora absent, this was a once in a lifetime chance to eliminate those in the castle. The strongest present were Aishia and Celia, who had ties to the Wise God Lina, but it was possible there were other threats hidden among them.

I would've liked to exclude the hero... But if she gets in the way, there's no choice but to kill her. I'll set it to keep damages to the castle and city to a minimum. I've got plenty of essence from saving up my magic for a thousand years. Worst comes to worst, the capital will just be erased from the map.

Once he finished inputting his entire order, Reiss removed his hand from the orb. The light of the spell formula faded, and a large amount of magic began to emerge from the orb. It was a sign of the golem activating.

Those on the ground will notice this ridiculous amount of essence soon enough.

The essence that was enough to make the air seem like it was shaking would reach the ground soon.

Just then, a change occurred to the source of the essence. A human-shaped exterior appeared like a materializing spirit. It was a bipedal robot with two arms, measuring roughly two meters tall.

The orb had been the core of this golem. This exterior form was what represented the activated golem.

It stared down at the Galarc Castle below. The sun was yet to rise completely, so the sky was still dim. In addition to this, there was over two kilometers distance to the ground, yet its eerily glowing eyes were able to clearly see the mansion and garden where everyone was gathered. Then, the golem moved its head and looked at Reiss.

Reiss had inputted his orders without being registered as the official owner. In this state, as long as he didn't attack the golem, the golem shouldn't register him as an enemy.

Reiss raised his arms in a show of nonresistance and slowly backed away from the golem. The golem then lost interest in him and looked away. Instead, its gaze was fixed on the mansion and its occupants below.

Immediately after, the golem pointed its mechanical right hand towards the mansion. Its magic essence swelled even more, concentrating around its hand.

Then, with a thundering boom, it fired a powerful bombardment of magic essence.

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"Now, it's time to fix the divergent futures," Miharu said to Celia with a smile.

For a brief moment, Celia was stunned into forgetting the current situation they were in. Then, she detected a surge in the essence source high overhead and looked up with a gasp. The sky was dim and the golem was so far away, it wouldn't have been visible even in the daylight, but it was clear which direction the source of the essence was in.

Magic essence that normally needed training to be visualized had been condensed so much, it formed visible rays of light. Immediately after, enough magic to wipe out the mansion and surrounding area was fired from the golem.

The sight was like a full moon appearing at early dawn.

"No way..." Celia muttered, freezing as she stared at the light falling from the sky. In fact, everyone in the garden was still with despair, as though they were watching the end of the world take place.

There were only two exceptions: Aishia, who was rising into the sky while preparing her essence to face the golem, and Miharu.

"*Dolus Magus: Excelsus Magia Castrum Murus.*"

Her hands were held up towards the sky as she recited a spell. As soon as she did so, ten enormous magic circles appeared in the air above Aishia.

Remote activation of magic?!

Celia instantly understood what Miharu was trying to do. The remote activation of magic was extremely technical. Spells were normally cast by forming the circle right by the caster's hands, but those that excelled at essence control were able to cast their magic circle anywhere within their field of view.

But the farther the distance from the caster, the more difficult that was to accomplish. When it came to advanced magic, that difficulty increased even more—especially when deploying multiple circles at once.

The multiple magic circles Miharu had just cast were located fifty meters away from her, and the formula appeared to be incredibly complex.

At any rate, a total of ten magic circles activated, forming a thick defensive wall of light around those in the garden of the mansion.

Aishia gazed in wonder at the barrier of magic essence that had suddenly appeared above her. For a brief moment, she wondered if she should activate something too, but promptly determined that the wall was enough and ceased her casting. No sooner had she did, the blast from the golem struck the essence barrier Miharu had deployed. Blinding light filled their field of view, illuminating the entire city.

With a rumbling roar, a storm blew over the area. In the midst of their obscured vision, the sound of a barrier shattering could be heard four times in quick succession.

But eventually, the sound slowed down to a stop with the ninth shatter. Celia still had her eyes closed against the light.

"This isn't the time to be standing around," Miharu said from right beside her.

"Huh?" Celia cracked open her eyes and glanced to her side.

"*Transilio*," Miharu said, having grabbed Celia's shoulder. A magic circle appeared under their feet, and the space around them distorted. The two disappeared from where they stood.

"Wha?!"

Multiple voices screamed as a thunderous sound like a falling meteorite could be heard. The golem had rapidly descended and landed on the ground. No, it was more like a fall than a descent. A violent shock wave spread from its point of landing.

It was at this point that Celia finally realized her surroundings had changed. Moments ago she had been with Miharu away from the rest of the others in the garden, but now they were in the middle of the group. It was as though they had

both teleported.

“Lady Celia, Lady Miharu, when did you both...?” Gouki gasped. But his attention was soon drawn to the golem that had descended. Celia looked as well—and realized that the golem was where she had been standing moments ago.

A cold chill ran down her spine. If she hadn’t moved, she would have been crushed into a lump of flesh.

This time, Aishia was the one to descend rapidly upon the golem, stomping down with the momentum of her fall. The sound of forceful impact rang out. But the golem had raised its right arm to easily block Aishia’s feet. Feathers from the wings growing from the golem’s back separated from the wings and floated into the air.

Aishia immediately distanced herself from the golem. Each feather was shaped like a sharp, triangular blade, connecting together to form the shape of wings. In separated form, it was like having countless knives floating in the air.

Satsuki materialized the spear that was her Divine Arms.

“Y-You’ve gotta be kidding me...” she muttered with dread in her voice.

“Stand back!” Aria yelled at the others. She grabbed her enchanted sword and stood before Liselotte to protect her. The others similarly grabbed their weapons to protect those who were unarmed. Aishia positioned herself between the golem and everyone else.

Satsuki’s feeling of dread was on the mark. The feathers floating in the air began flying, aimed straight at the residents of the mansion.

“I won’t let you,” Aishia said.

She immediately deployed countless light orbs of essence. Each one moved all at once to intercept the approaching blades. Her aim was so accurate, it managed to strike and deflect every single blade.

However, while the orbs Aishia released had struck the blades and deflected them, they hadn’t been able to harm them. The blades were knocked off trajectory, some falling to the ground, but they all quickly readjusted and started flying at the residents of the mansion again.

Aishia quickly tried to make more light orbs, but the golem moved to attack her directly. It moved in front of her in an instant, raising its metallic fist and swinging at her face.

“Guh...!”

Aishia crossed her arms in front of herself and deployed an essence barrier at the same time. The golem’s fist made smashed into the barrier and shattered it. Aishia was sent backwards with the momentum, nearly flying away. She wasn’t

able to kill the force of the impact completely, and her arms bent in a disturbing way.

She nearly proceeded to crash into Latifa behind her, when Aishia turned into her spirit form just before making contact.

“Wah! Huh?!”

Only the mask she had been wearing remained, which fell to the ground. Latifa blinked, wide-eyed in shock.

But Aishia promptly reappeared, grabbing the falling mask and putting it back on. Her arms were restored by rematerializing, although a dull pain remained. However, by that point, the feathers of the golem were about to reach the residents of the mansion.

“Ngh...”

Aishia’s normally inexpressive face was now panic-stricken. She must have thought there were too many people for her to protect alone. Despite that, she quickly tried to deploy more essence orbs to do something about the flying blades.

Just then, without any warning, countless magic circles appeared all across the ground. Each one was cast in the way of a flying feather. A light bullet of magic shot vertically out of every magic circle, striking the golem’s feather blades and deflecting them upwards. Setting aside the matter of who had cast the magic, Aishia immediately fired her orbs of light too. The essence flew through the air like it was being sucked towards the feathers, deflecting them all further.

But her attention on the blades had distracted her from the golem’s main body, and the golem had used that chance to vanish.

With the disappearance of the golem, everyone including Aishia looked around on high alert. The next moment, a fist swung down upon Celia’s head. The sound of a fierce impact rang out, but the golem’s fist was prevented from reaching Celia by a wall of light. Celia flinched belatedly as she realized the golem had been closing in on her from above.

While the others were also reacting with their own shock, Miharu was the only one staring up at the golem with a completely calm look. Then, a crack appeared in the barrier above their heads.

“No! Hmph!”

Gouki immediately readied his katana, but a new magic circle appeared between them and the golem. Magic essence fired from that circle, but the golem reflexively dodged the extremely close-ranged blast at high speed without any issue. But another magic circle appeared where it moved to, as though its

evasion had been predicted from the start. A new blast of magic essence was fired from there, but the golem was able to evade that one easily too.

The magic circle was positioned in what appeared to be the golem's blind spot, yet the golem had reacted as though it had seen it. But more magic circles appeared in rapid succession, forcing the golem to keep evading.

"Huh..."

The continued deployment of circles with no verbal casting made it confusing to tell who the caster was at a glance.

Miharu is casting all of those...

While everyone else was staring at the golem's movements in astonishment, Celia was the only one who was watching Miharu's side profile with bated breath. She understood that Miharu was using the highly advanced technique of wordless magic activation.

Aishia had also noticed that Miharu was activating magic without using verbal spells and came to stand beside her.

"*Alis Luminis*."

Just then, Miharu recited a spell, and wings of light grew from her back. Her body rose into the air, ignoring gravity.

She can even use light wing flying magic...

Celia's surprise intensified. Light wing flying magic was an ancient spell she had only just obtained recently herself.

Satsuki and the others were taken aback as well. "Miharu...?"

Meanwhile, there was a change in the golem's movements as well. It drew its feather blades back towards its body while readjusting its posture, then swung its arms to send a sweeping shock wave at them. It seemed to have determined that Miharu's attacks weren't powerful enough to bother avoiding.

"The odds will be stacked against us at this rate. Aishia, can you do something about the blades in the air? Celia, gather everyone in a single spot and stop them from acting on their own."

Miharu gave orders to Aishia and Celia, who were on either side of her. Then —

"I will lead that thing away from here," she said, charging straight at the golem in the air without waiting for their reply.

"Huh?! Wha— Miharu?!"

"I'll be back," Aishia said, ignoring Celia's shock and taking off after Miharu.

"F-Fine, jeez! Everyone, come over here! I think Miharu has a plan!"

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There were a million things on Celia's mind, but she raised her voice and called for the people in the garden first. However, they were more hesitant than Celia herself.

Everyone was slow to react. Part of it was because they couldn't keep up with the situation, but they also didn't have any trust in leaving the battle to Miharu. While she could use simple spirit arts, she was a delicate noncombatant and had a personality unsuited for war. That was the common opinion between the residents of the mansion.

But at the same time, Miharu was most certainly showing abnormal combat prowess right now. She was using magic she shouldn't be able to use, flying through the air with magic wings of light.

Miharu deployed several magic circles around her wordlessly while rapidly approaching the golem. The golem also charged straight forward to crush Miharu. But before the golem could reach her, one of her magic circles fired a blast.

The golem instantly vanished, evading the blast. It reappeared right before Miharu, swinging its fist.

"Look out—!"

Sara and the others on the ground paled. But Miharu deployed another barrier of light to her side and blocked the golem's fist. The golem's feathers closed in on her from behind to pierce her in the back, but Aishia manipulated her orbs of light to deflect the feathers.

"Well done," Miharu said with a pleased grin. She then shot Celia a glance to urge her into gathering everyone up faster.

Celia startled, then raised her voice. "C-Come on, everyone! Gather here!"

At that, everyone finally started approaching Celia in confusion. The battle above their heads continued as they did so.

The golem was flying around at a speed faster than the eye could follow. No human body would have been able to withstand the recoil, but that didn't affect the golem. It rapidly repeated its sudden acceleration and sudden braking, attempting to attack Miharu from her blind spot.

Yes, *attempting*.

Miharu was casting spell circle after spell circle without moving in the air. She was only using two types of magic: one that fired a blast of magic essence, and one that deployed an essence barrier.

She prevented the approach of the golem using these two spells alone. She wasn't even looking at her surroundings, yet she was able to accurately block the

golem no matter which direction it came at her from and aim her essence shots perfectly every time. It was almost like she knew which direction the golem would come from.

Sorcerers were weak against soldiers in close combat. That was common sense, yet the way she was fighting right now overthrew such concepts completely.

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Amazing...

Celia was so captivated by the sight, she nearly forgot about the situation they were in. But just then, the golem's magic essence increased. Those on the ground who could detect it stiffened.

Immediately after, the golem charged straight at Miharu. Miharu deployed a barrier of light to block the golem's fist, but the moment the golem made contact, the barrier shattered like glass.

Miharu rose diagonally upwards to distance herself from the golem. But the golem flew right after her, closing that distance once again.

Looks like this is as much time as I can buy. At least everyone's gathered as planned.

Miharu took one glance at Celia and the others on the ground and grinned. She then cast a magic circle in front of her, aiming a blast at the golem below her.

The golem swung its left fist and swept away the incoming blast. It then held its right hand up at Miharu and released an intense heat ray. The heat ray spread in a conical shape starting from its palm, swallowing Miharu and blocking her escape route.

"Look out!" Sara and the others yelled from the ground.

But at that moment, Miharu was already enveloped by the light. The beam converged and eventually faded.

"No... That can't be... Miharu..."

Unable to see Miharu anywhere, Satsuki paled in horror. She feared that Miharu had been erased without a trace by the heat ray, but—

"I'm right here," Miharu's voice said from beside her.

Satsuki and the others whirled around with a gasp to see her standing there with them.

"What?!"

The group was stunned speechless. Just when did she get there?

The golem had also noticed how Miharu had moved to the ground, its gaze following her there. Aishia had also noticed Miharu and Celia moving and positioned herself between the golem and everyone.

"Aishia, you can't fight freely with all these hindrances, right? I'll get everyone away from here, so you deal with that thing," Miharu said, raising her voice to call out to Aishia.

After a brief pause, Aishia nodded. "Got it."

At the same time, the golem aimed its blade feathers at those on the ground.

Aishia reacted immediately, sending out light bullets to deflect the feathers, but Miharu chanted first.

"*Universus Transilio.*"

A gigantic magic circle immediately appeared beneath everyone's feet.

"What's this?!" Celia gasped as her vision distorted; everyone who had been standing in the mansion garden vanished, leaving only Aishia and the golem behind. Her eyes widened at their disappearance and suspended the light bullets she was in the middle of casting. The golem's blades also froze in place, having lost their targets. In the sky above, the golem was glancing around in confusion.

Aishia used that chance to fire all her light bullets at the golem instead. She then rose to a higher altitude herself and vanished, reappearing right beside the golem, and released the essence she built up in her right hand at close range. But the golem reflexively evaded the blast by a hair's breadth.

However, the light bullets Aishia had been controlling at the same time drew a complex trajectory and directly struck the golem's body. The impact did barely any physical damage, but the metallic material of the golem's body swayed the slightest amount.

And that was enough for the golem to change its target. The gaze that had been drifting in search of the vanished mansion residents locked onto Aishia instead.

"I won't let you leave. You *will* be defeated here."

It was unclear if the golem could understand her, but Aishia uttered her words of provocation anyway.

It was right after this that her mask creaked quietly.

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Moments ago, just after Miharu used her teleportation magic, King Francois, Christina, Flora, Sakata Hiroaki, Roanna, and Lilianna had gathered together on the rooftop garden of the Galarc Castle. They had received word of the commotion in the capital and made their way there—the place with the best view—to gather what information they could. They were surrounded by Duke Huguenot and other important figures and their guards from the Centostella Kingdom.

The sky was dim and made it difficult to see clearly, but they were able to make out what was happening in the garden by the mansion. They watched the golem attacking Miharu with dumbfounded expressions.

“H-Hey, what’s going on over there? That robot thing looks really bad...” Hiroaki said, face twitching. The word “robot” didn’t exist in this world, but everyone understood that he was referring to the golem.

However, that didn’t mean there was anyone capable of answering him; they were all at a loss for words, and the hero’s question went ignored. They all had more than one question in their minds, and were struggling to process everything as is. Hiroaki himself wasn’t expecting an answer and didn’t bother repeating himself.

However, the situation unfolding before them continued to change. The golem fired a wide-spanning beam of light at Miharu from its right hand. The cone of light instantly swallowed Miharu whole.

“Ah...!”

The castle grounds lit up like it was midday as an explosion reached their ears. One beat later, a fierce wind reached the rooftop garden of the castle. It was the shock wave of the golem’s attack. Unable to withstand the wind, Christina and the others covered their faces with their arms.

“Shit, it’s a real-life mecha!” Hiroaki yelled while hiding his face.

Eventually, the wind ceased.

“Lady Miharu? Lady Miharu is gone!”

“It’s okay, she’s alive!”

Flora paled when she saw Miharu vanish from where she had been floating, but Christina quickly pointed at the ground, where Miharu was standing beside Celia.

“Oh, thank goodness...” Flora exhaled in relief. Immediately after, an enormous magic circle appeared beneath their feet. The space around the residents of the mansion distorted heavily—before everyone that had been gathered together vanished.

“Huh...?” Flora doubted her eyes as she blinked, but there was no one left standing there in the garden.

“Wh-Where are we...?” Satsuki’s voice said from behind Flora.

“It appears to be the rooftop garden of the castle...” Charlotte answered in confusion. Christina and the others whirled around to see all the residents of the mansion standing before them.

“What?!” Flora squeaked in shock.

Francois’s eyes were also wide open in astonishment. “My word...” he muttered.

“Was that teleportation magic just now?” Alma guessed.

“But how?” pondered Orphia. As spirit folk, they were capable of using teleportation sorcery, but the sorcery was incredibly complex to use. In fact, it was considered extremely advanced ancient sorcery that was impossible to use in modern-day Strahl. How could that teleportation sorcery have been used?

We’ve never set the coordinates of this location... So was it Miharu? Or maybe Celia?

Sara’s gaze naturally traveled to Miharu and Celia. The other residents of the mansion had also caught on to who might have teleported them and looked in their direction.

Then, as though to reveal the answer—

“*Si vis pacem, para bellum legio*,” Miharu recited anew.

Another spell that’s different from what I know...

Celia listened for the slight difference in the spell. Immediately after, a magic circle appeared around everyone’s bodies.

“This is...” Gouki murmured, looking down at his limbs as he sensed the change.

“I’ve temporarily raised the aptitude of your bodies with magic. In this state, you’ll be able to cast more powerful spells and fight more effectively,” Miharu explained. Just like how she described, a feeling of absurd omnipotence rose within their bodies.

“Wow, this is amazing,” Satsuki said with wide eyes.

“However, there are some opponents that cannot be defeated no matter how hard you try. You should stand back and leave this one to her,” Miharu warned, looking up at the sky where Aishia was fighting with the golem.

Indeed, Aishia was flying around at a stupendous speed as she exchanged blows with the golem. Everyone could see how reckless it would be to interrupt that battle.

However, did that make it okay to look on while doing nothing? Was it truly okay to let an unknown girl fight all by herself? That kind of conflict was clear in everyone’s faces, and Miharu could see that.

“If you absolutely refuse to sit back, then keep it to support fire at most. Sara, Orphia, Alma—the three of you who are experienced with midair combat would be best suited for that,” she said to them in warning.

“Miharu...” Personally nominated, Sara called out Miharu’s name to ask her something.

“Now, we’ve got something else to do, so...”

“Huh?”

Miharu grinned and grabbed Celia's shoulder. "*Transilio*." She then uttered her spell and vanished with Celia.

"Wha...?"

Satsuki was left behind, terribly confused.

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Meanwhile, Miharu and Celia had moved somewhere indoors. It was a vast space with a remarkably large crystal floating at the center—a spirit stone, perhaps? There was a door that connected the room to somewhere.

"Where are we?" Celia asked, looking around the room in wonder.

"My atelier deep beneath the Galarc Castle."

"Deep beneath the castle..."

Celia had never heard of such a place located deep beneath the Galarc Castle. In fact, she didn't think the royal family themselves knew of this place. Just when was it built? Did Miharu build it? How? Question after question filled her head.

"I prepared it a thousand years ago," Miharu explained, marching over to the crystal floating in the middle of the room.

"A-A thousand years ago..." Celia was dumbfounded with amazement.

"You've got a vague idea of who I am already, right? Or have you forgotten my power?" Miharu asked with a grin.

"So you *are* who I think you are... Okay. What do you want me to do?"

Celia was struck speechless for a moment, but she quickly pulled herself together. With a heavy sigh, she began following Miharu's steps.

Miharu turned around and smiled pleasantly. "I knew I could count on you. You always get straight to the point, even though you must have plenty of questions."

"We have to do something about that thing outside, no?"

"Exactly. The golem that's rampaging above us is the ultimate battle artifact the Wise Gods created to use during the Divine War. Aishia will be able to buy time, but she won't be able to win no matter how hard she tries."

"Not even Aishia...?"

"Those monsters were created to buy time against transcendent ones, not defeat them. Just so you know, the situation is far worse than you could imagine."

"What can we do against something like that?"

Could it even be defeated? But Rio wasn't at the Galarc Castle right now. She didn't know where he was either. Panic started seeping into Celia's voice.

"It's simple," Miharu said, unexpectedly calm and eloquent. "If the people at the castle can't defeat it, we'll just call someone who can."

"Someone who can? Don't tell me..."

A certain person flashed through Celia's mind. The strongest person she knew. The boy she could rely on more than anyone.

"It's exactly who you think it is. We're going to summon him here."

Miharu nodded smugly, grinning from ear to ear.

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Chapter 2: Golem

Back at the rooftop garden of the Galarc Castle, Sumeragi Satsuki gazed up at the sky.

What is going on...

In the early hours before dawn, a pillar of fire had risen in the capital. Then, a beam of destruction rained down from the skies to destroy the mansion. But before it could do so, a giant magic circle appeared and blocked the beam with a barrier.

After that, a metal robot-like being fell down and started attacking, but an unfamiliar pink-haired girl in a mask began fighting it as though to protect them. Miharu also began casting magic to fight it, before teleporting everyone to the rooftop garden of the castle, then taking Celia and teleporting away.

That left Satsuki and the others in their current situation: standing in the rooftop garden, wondering what had just happened. Were they dreaming? Their confusion was only natural, and they needed more time to process things.

However, what was certain was that the battle was still ongoing. The pink-haired girl in the mask—Aishia—and the metal puppet—the golem—were still exchanging blows. Miharu had restricted the golem's high-speed combat by deploying barriers where she predicted it would move, but Aishia was fighting by matching its speed with her own.

The golem flew around fast enough to look like teleportation, but Aishia was moving at the same speed.

"Wow... She's keeping up with that speed..." Orphia mumbled in wonder. Even as a high elf that specialized in flight-related spirit arts, she was incapable of such a feat.

"Who is she?" King Francois asked, wondering if anyone knew her.

"She's a spirit. A humanoid one..." Sara answered hesitantly.

Francois had been given information about their contract spirits, but not everyone else present was in on the loop. However, now wasn't the time to worry about the restriction of information. In fact, Sara's hesitation was entirely due to the rarity of Aishia's identity as a humanoid spirit.

"A humanoid spirit?"

“Humanoid spirits are extremely high-ranking among spirits. There should only be a handful that exist in the world.”

“And one of them is that masked girl?”

“Yes,” Sara said with a nod, then added in explanation, “though I don’t know who she is or why she’s fighting...”

Francois hummed in thought. “Hmm...”

“But she’s protecting us, right? She told us to run earlier,” Latifa pointed out. She looked over at Aishia with a worried gaze.

“Yes, she did,” Alma agreed gravely.

Suddenly, the evenly matched battle between Aishia and the golem tipped heavily in favor of one side.

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Aishia was flying around at a high speed, attacking the golem while taking care to keep her distance. The golem seemed to have deemed that closing that distance was the easiest way to overpower her, and was resolutely attempting to do so.

Aishia knew that if the battle turned into close combat, she would be at a disadvantage. The golem was covered in hard armor—the exact material was unclear to her, but it looked like a sturdy metal. If it was regular steel, she would have been able to dent it with a physically enhanced blow, but steel was nothing compared to the armor of the golem; she could guess that much from watching her spirit arts strike it.

The golem covered in hard armor was two meters tall, while Aishia was just a petite girl. Even if she physically enhanced her body, it was clear who would have the advantage in direct hand-to-hand combat, which was why Aishia was maintaining her distance while casting elemental spirit arts of fire, water, ice, and lightning.

Lightning is no good either.

None of the elements had any effect. Did the golem have no elemental weaknesses? If so, her only option would be to physically damage the armor, but...

In order to activate a spirit art with enough force to do that while flying at such high speeds, she would have to give up on using any other spirit arts to defend herself. That would leave her open to the golem’s attacks.

The golem was constantly manipulating its feather blades to attack Aishia as

it moved towards her. Aishia intercepted each one by deploying several hundred bullets of light, but that left her unable to activate a spirit art to break through the golem's armor.

"Ugh..."

A crack ran down the mask she was wearing. After being recognized as a transcendent one along with Rio, she fell under the influence of the same rules of god as him.

In other words, if she did anything to support a specific individual, a penalty would be inflicted that removed their memories of her. The mask was able to bear the burden of that penalty, but it had reached the limit of what it could withstand.

I'm going to run out of time like this. I have no choice but to do it.

Focusing on running would allow her to buy time, but that would only end in disaster once her mask broke completely; she had to defeat the golem before that happened. Aishia started allocating some of her defense to prepare her essence.

Unfortunately, the golem changed its attack pattern at the same time, most likely in response to Aishia's constant aversion to close combat. It started increasing its means of long-ranged attacks in addition to the feather blades.

In other words, apart from the detached feathers from its back that were flying about freely, it gained a ranged attack that converted magic essence to destructive energy. One-meter-long spears of light started shooting rapidly from the sharp ends of its hand and feet.

The golem spread its wings, held its arms up, and directed its suppressive fire at Aishia's most likely route of flight. The number of bullets was off the charts, and enough firepower to cause widespread annihilation was directed at Aishia alone.

Each spear of light had ridiculous might behind it. When several spears struck the large lake beside the capital, huge pillars of water rose in Aishia's view. At that, she realized how bad it would be if the spears fell upon the castle or city.

Aishia immediately restricted her movement to the area above the golem's head. Fortunately, the golem was unable to alter the trajectory of the light spears after firing them. Instead, it was able to precisely control the movements of the feather blades from its back. Thus, the light spears were used to limit her movements, while the feather blades were used to finish her off.

And so, in order to deal with the golem's suppressive fire, Aishia was forced to deploy and maintain hundreds of light bullets. She was capable of controlling

her light bullets with spirit arts, so she used them to block the approaching feather blades. It would be bad if the powerful light spears hit her directly, but she was able to dodge them all by watching them.

"Guh..."

The golem was using a tremendous number of projectiles, demanding control like threading a needle while running. Since Aishia was also restricting her movements to reduce damage to the castle and city, it was even harder for her to deal with the attacks.

Pushed back by the golem's attacks that overwhelmed her in both power and number, Aishia was forced into focusing solely on defense. She normally didn't show her emotions, but her expression was hard-pressed right now.

Why doesn't it run out of essence when it's putting so much power into each attack?

From the looks of its barrage, it was hard to believe it had an essence limit. How long could it continue firing like this? Was it possible to aim for it to exhaust itself? Aishia considered all the possibilities as she evaded the rain of light spears.

However, with no means of measuring the golem's magic essence, aiming for it to run out would be as good as a gamble. There was a limit to how much her mask could endure, and there was a limit to her own essence without Rio to resupply it. It was more likely Aishia would reach her limit first.

Besides, it was doubtful if she could even continue to fend off the golem's attacks like this. She was just barely blocking the attacks—a single mistake could result in a direct hit on her. If that happened, she would immediately be rendered incapable of combat.

I can't wait for it to run out of essence. I have to be the one to attack...

Aishia came to that conclusion, but her hands were so full with enduring the barrage, she couldn't think of any way of counterattacking and breaking through the golem's armor. The number of projectiles was so stupendous, it was too risky to neglect her defenses to save essence.

Aishia panicked. At this rate, she would be wasting her essence and mask endurance and run out of time.

It was right after this that the barrage of light spears ceased, and she lost sight of the golem's main body.

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Back at the rooftop garden of the Galarc Castle, Satsuki watched pillars of water rise from the lake in horror.

“What is that ridiculous rain of light...?” she muttered.

Aishia had immediately positioned herself above the golem’s head to deal with the incoming barrage of beams. Like Satsuki had described, it looked just like light was raining upwards.

“She’s being cornered...” Sara suddenly mumbled. It was clear Aishia’s situation had taken a turn for the worse.

“She’s fighting to reduce damage to the castle and city,” Gouki immediately observed.

The mighty spears of light that created explosions upon impact were being strewn about like handfuls of sand. If those spears were directed at the capital, the city would be reduced to rubble in no time at all.

“That lady is protecting us after all!” Latifa shouted in a fluster.

“Say, shouldn’t we fight too?” Masato asked with a serious face.

“D-Dumbass! What can you do out there? You’ll die!”

Worried for her little brother, Aki immediately scolded Masato with a horrified look.

“But there’s nowhere for us to run, right? We don’t know when those attacks will turn on us instead. Besides, I’m a hero now too, and that lady is gonna die at this rate...” Masato clenched his fist in concern.

Indeed, even if they were to evacuate into the castle, they would just be buried alive if it were destroyed. If the spears of light were scattered across a wide area, there was no telling where they would land. There was nowhere safe they could flee to.

Their only options were to evacuate indoors and pray they wouldn’t get buried alive, or remain somewhere they could observe the situation and prepare to run when needed. More importantly, this wasn’t the kind of place they could just abandon and flee from either—it was the castle in the royal capital, a location to be defended.

“But you can’t even fly...” Aki mumbled weakly.

At that, Sara called out to Orphia and Alma. “We’ll take to the sky. Right, Orphia, Alma?”

“Yup.”

“Of course.”

Orphia and Alma replied firmly.

“I shall go too,” Gouki immediately offered.

“No, you should stay here and guard everyone,” Sara replied, shaking her head. “We don’t know how many enemies there are or what their goal is, so the strongest of us should remain in case it descends here. We’re more experienced at fighting in the air anyway.”

“Got it.” Gouki hesitated for a moment, but eventually accepted her suggestion and agreed with a heavy sigh.

“Okay, then. Orphia, call Ariel.”

“Right. Come, Ariel,” Orphia said, materializing Ariel as a giant bird. Sara and Alma climbed onto its back along with Orphia.

“Then we’ll be off,” Sara said to everyone as Ariel rose into the air.

“Look, the light...!” Flora cried, pointing at the sky. The golem had immediately ceased firing spears of light from its hands and wings.

“Look out!” Satsuki yelled.

In the next moment, the golem had moved above Aishia, swinging its fist down with all its might.

Aishia immediately deployed a wall of magic essence to catch the golem’s fist. But the barrier was unable to withstand the impact and shattered in an instant. However, it was able to buy enough time for Aishia to distance herself from the golem.

The golem chased after her right away. At the same time, it manipulated its feather blades to slash at her from every direction.

Aishia used light bullets to deflect the feather blades and stop the golem’s main body from approaching further. However, the golem seemed to have determined that the light bullets weren’t powerful enough to fear from their battle until now. It continued towards Aishia without flinching.

“Ugh...!”

Aishia left the minimal number of light bullets around her to fend off the feather blades and aimed the rest all at the golem.

Several of the bullets struck the golem in succession. But as expected, the golem’s armor was tough. Its speed was reduced a bit, but it didn’t falter as it charged at Aishia.

She was lacking power. Even if she wanted to retreat and gain distance from the golem, the feather blades were flying around to cut off her flight routes. At this rate, the golem would reach her and bring them into a close combat battle. Aishia promptly braced herself for the worst, when a thick beam of light passed in front of Aishia, striking the golem directly. Aishia looked downwards in search of where the unexpected reinforcements came from and saw three figures

riding on Ariel's back.

Orphia, Sara, and Alma...

The shot just now had been fired by Orphia, who still had her hand held out.

"Don't come closer!" Aishia immediately shouted at them.

The spirit folk girls stiffened in surprise.

The essence shot Orphia had fired was definitely stronger than the countless light orbs Aishia had created. The shot had burst upon impact, creating a surge of shock waves that succeeded in stopping the golem's approach.

But that was all. The golem's armor was undamaged as always. The golem seemed to decide the spirit folk girls were to be targets as well, as it included them in the feather blades' attack.

Aishia controlled her light bullets to deflect the feather blades attacking the three girls. At the same time, she approached the golem to redirect its attention to herself. The golem swung its arm at Aishia, slashing at her body with its sharp nails of light.

But Aishia rose in the air while twisting her body, skillfully evading its nails while landing a roundhouse kick at its face.

It's so heavy...

She could feel the heavy weight of the golem through her leg. It was like she had kicked a thick steel pillar fixed firmly to the ground. The golem's torso shook slightly, but it didn't feel like she had done any damage to it.

Just then, the tail growing from the golem's back bent like a whip. The end of the tail that was as sharp as a spear stretched forward like a bullet, attempting to pierce Aishia's body.

"Guh...!"

Aishia twisted her body and avoided the tail. But the golem's tail wrapped around her like a snake as though it had predicted that.

Aishia instantly turned into her spirit form. Only her mask was left behind, as it began its fall to the ground, but she quickly reappeared and put it back on. The golem moved its tail just as quickly to attack her, swinging its arms at the same time to tear her apart. Aishia used her small size to her advantage and dodged its attacks.

It was at that moment that the feather blades returned to the golem, flying around Aishia as though to encircle her and block her escape. She would be able to escape in her spirit form, but she'd end up leaving her mask behind inside the encirclement. Besides, constantly dematerializing and rematerializing consumed a lot of magic essence, so it was best to avoid doing so without her contractor

nearby.

As a result, Aishia was trapped in the spherical space the feather blades had created, forced to fight with the golem.

It was disadvantageous enough having a close combat battle against a giant and sturdy opponent in a spherical space of a few meters in diameter. On top of that, the golem's tail moved like a third arm.

With limited space to move, it was impossible to keep evading its attacks. Which left her with no choice but to counterattack. She held her hands out in front of her and released a shock wave to push the golem outside of the space.

But the golem similarly held its hands out and created an essence barrier, blocking Aishia's shock waves.

"Ngh..."

It didn't even budge. Instead, the golem charged at Aishia, using its nails to slash at her.

Aishia quickly evaded by moving up, just barely evading the blades by flipping midair, then descended back down to stomp on the golem with both feet. There was enough force in her attack to easily crush a boulder to dust, but the golem took the attack easily.

Immediately after, Aishia spotted the golem's tail swaying in the corner of her eye. It was impossible to continue evading the golem's attacks in this closed space surrounded by blades. She prepared herself to turn into her spirit form and discard her mask. The mask would fall and end up ripped to shreds by the blades, but there was no helping it.

Just then, powerful spirit arts started flying over one after another, tearing apart the barrier of feather blades. The blades were blown all over the place, creating holes in the encirclement. Aishia quickly accelerated and escaped through a hole.

The next second, a large mass of water dozens of meters in diameter fell from above. It was like a meteor, striking the golem within the circle of feathers directly.

Why...

Aishia looked upwards to see Sara and Alma standing midair on footholds of compressed essence created with their spirit arts; she determined that the attack just now was a spirit art they worked together to cast.

It was no mere water mass: despite being a liquid, it seemed to have properties close to a solid, and capable of keeping its shape without bursting as it made direct contact with the golem and feather blades, swallowing them whole.

“Now, let’s seal it, Alma!”

“Okay! It’s all yours, Orphia!”

It seemed that Sara and Alma were still in the middle of casting their spirit art together, and were maintaining the water prison so that the golem couldn’t escape.

“Yup!” said Orphia, who then manipulated a powerful electric attack to shock the golem in the water mass. The three of them were all first-class spirit art casters and had splendid teamwork from growing up together.

“The three of you, stop fighting. Run,” Aishia said to them with a panicked look. She clearly didn’t believe that they could do something about the golem.

“Please, don’t speak nonsense!” Sara yelled while maintaining her spirit arts.

Aishia’s eyes widened.

“We can tell you’re trying to protect us, but there’s no reason we can’t fight for ourselves.”

After all, to the three spirit folk girls, Aishia was currently a stranger.

“This opponent is extremely dangerous...” Aishia said, frustrated that she couldn’t tell them it was her duty to protect everyone in Rio’s absence.

“We could tell that much by watching it fight. We can also tell you’re much stronger than us... But the monster is stronger than you. You can’t defeat it alone, can you?” Sara replied while gazing at the water prison, as though to ask her to rely on them.

It was true; Aishia wasn’t sure she could defeat it alone. At this rate, the most she could do was buy time, and it was obvious the golem would eventually be released into the city. If Sara and the others hadn’t supported her earlier, she might have already fallen to the golem.

“If that thing isn’t defeated, this place may turn into a pile of rubble,” Aishia said.

“So let’s fight together,”

“We’ll provide you with support.”

Orphia and Alma called out to Aishia firmly.

“We won’t yield regarding this,” Sara emphasized for good measure.

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Aishia was hesitant, but she nodded her head heavily. “Fine. Then I will face that thing in the front line. The floating blades are most annoying, so please get them out of my way. The spears of light can be evaded, so ignore those.”

Even if she continued buying time, there was no future for the capital if the golem wasn’t defeated. That was the thought that changed her decision.

“Got it,” Sara replied happily. It was right afterwards that the water prison covering the golem burst from internal pressure.

“Guh...”

The trapped golem had spread its wings of light and deployed its feather blades around itself. Its silver mechanical body was decorated with glittering water spray.

The sight was so sublime, it was like an angel had appeared. But in the eyes of Sara and the others, it probably looked more like a devil.

“Hel!”

“Ifritah!”

In response to Sara’s and Alma’s calls, a silver wolf spirit and lion spirit appeared. The two girls then jumped onto the backs of their contract spirits. Orphia was also riding on the back of her contract spirit, Ariel.

Hel and Ifritah didn’t have wings, but they were able to create footholds of magic essence in the air like Sara and Alma and run on top of them.

“Leave evading to Hel and Ifritah! We’re going to focus on controlling our spirit arts and put up a barrage!” Sara yelled their plan so that Aishia could hear it too.

“Okay!”

“Got it!”

Orphia and Alma replied enthusiastically, before the three contract spirits scattered in different directions. Immediately after, the blades being controlled by the golem dispersed and followed after them.

Don’t die, you three...

Aishia ignored the attacks aimed at the spirit folk girls and charged at the golem’s body.

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Meanwhile, deep beneath the Galarc Castle, Celia and Miharu stood facing each other in a room with a high ceiling and a giant crystal floating in the middle.

“Summon him... You mean Rio? You’re summoning Rio to the castle? But we don’t even know where he is. How would that be possible?” Celia asked curiously.

“He should be in the Holy City Tonerico, in the Holy Kingdom of Almada. So we’re going to use summoning sorcery.” Miharu answered in a calm tone, but summoning sorcery was legendary sorcery even spirit folk couldn’t use.

“Summoning sorcery...” Celia’s eyes widened. She only knew of the summoning sorcery used on heroes.

“I know his general coordinates, but precise coordinates are required to designate someone specific for summoning. You’re going to help me.”

“All right. What should I do?”

The battle aboveground was ongoing even now, so Celia pulled herself together with a serious look.

“Come over here,” Miharu said with a smug smile, approaching the crystal floating at the center of the room.

Isn’t this crystal a spirit stone?

The crystal was glowing a pale gold, a color she had never seen in a spirit stone before. Celia followed Miharu to the crystal and observed it up close.

“Think of it as a spirit stone with extremely high purity. We call it a mana crystal. It has a ridiculous amount of magic essence in it, so it’s perfect as a catalyst for maintaining large-scale sorcery,” Miharu explained, as if she could anticipate Celia’s question.

“Mana crystal...” Celia gulped.

“There’s summoning sorcery and other necessary sorcery sealed in this crystal, so we’re going to activate it all in order.”

Miharu held her hands over the mana crystal. The light flowing from the crystal slightly grew in intensity.

“Now synchronize your essence with the crystal,” she said to Celia.

“Like this?”

Celia held both her hands over the mana crystal and poured her essence into it. This kind of essence control was necessary for extracting essence from enchanted gems and spirit stones, as well as for using certain artifacts.

“Yes. I’ll do the necessary steps to activate the sorcery... You just focus on synchronizing with the crystal.”

“Leave it to me,” Celia said with a firm nod.

“It’ll require a high degree of essence control, so don’t let your mind wander.”

Miharu smiled sweetly and increased the amount of essence she was outputting. At that, the mana crystal glowed even brighter. Celia's eyes widened.

What is this...?

The essence inside the mana crystal began swirling like a violent storm. If she didn't focus, she would fall out of sync and suspend the activation of the sorcery.

"I've commenced the search for his exact coordinates. I'm going to increase the processing speed—keep up!" Miharu said lightly.

"R-Right..."

Increasing the search speed meant increasing the difficulty of the essence control required. A cold sweat broke out along Celia's forehead as she nodded.

"You can do it. You're the descendant of my best homunculus, whom Lina created, after all."

Celia's eyes widened, startled by the sudden revelation of her ancestry.

"Let's hurry. Before it's too late." A look of sorrow flashed across Miharu's face.

"Of course." Celia stiffened and nodded.

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Meanwhile, in the sky above the Galarc Castle, a fierce battle was taking place. At this point, the golem controlled several hundred feathers; each one flew as though they had their own will, attacking the target the main body had designated. That target had been Aishia earlier, but was now split between Sara, Orphia, and Alma. Sara used water bullets, Orphia used light bullets, and Alma used fire bullets to deflect the feather blades flying at them.

She was dealing with all these feathers by herself...

The spirit folk girls' faces were grim. The contract spirits they were riding were handling all the evasion, allowing them to focus on unleashing a barrage. But their hands were full even after splitting the duties like that. Just now, Aishia had been taking on the golem's main body while intercepting the feather blades using light bullets and avoiding the light spears at the same time. The spirit folk girls could keenly feel the difference between them as spirit art casters.

"Guh! How hard are those feathers?"

Each feather was roughly a dozen or so centimeters long. As long as they made contact, it was easy to knock them off their trajectory. But no matter how many times they were deflected, they couldn't inflict any damage. They

immediately corrected their path and resumed flying, so there was no end to the number of attacks.

However, just drawing the attention of the feather blades was a boon; Aishia was able to fight the golem's main body more freely with less burden.

The golem spread its wings of light as Aishia approached from overhead, firing spears of light at her. Aishia weaved through the attack and closed the distance to the golem. When she was right before it, the golem swung its right arm at her.

A direct hit had enough force to reduce any other living creature to dust. It would be more damage to Aishia's physical body than she could maintain too.

Aishia came to a sudden stop before the golem and turned like a spinning top to get around to the golem's back. Immediately after, powerful destructive energy was released from the glowing wings of light on the golem's back. Aishia swiftly retreated to evade the explosion, but the golem moved right beside Aishia and swung its fist. Aishia twisted her body to evade it, stepping on the golem's arm for footing and leaping to increase their distance.

But the golem immediately caught up to Aishia and swung its fist again. Aishia smoothly moved aside, having no intention of being caught in the attack.

That marked the start of the game of chase between them. The golem swung its fists and tail in an attempt to punch and tear Aishia apart, which she continued to evade by a hair's breadth.

Of course, as a spirit, Aishia could regenerate her spirit body to perfect condition even if she sustained a serious wound in her physical form. However, when a spirit's physical form was wounded to that point, it took far much more magic essence to materialize again than when materializing normally.

From their battle up until that point, she knew that the golem couldn't easily be harmed. In order to kill the golem, a considerable amount of essence needed to be expended in an attack. Aishia wasn't sure she had enough essence to regenerate her body in case of a serious wound *and* defeat the golem once regenerated.

I can only evade its attacks for now.

While she wanted to distance herself and take her time carefully refining her essence, creating too much distance could cause the golem to attack the spirit folk girls instead.

Sara and the others had to focus on dealing with the feather blades. That meant Aishia had to keep the golem's main body focused on herself. She maintained a distance that was neither too close nor too far, refining her essence

without counterattacking.

However, putting on a united front with the spirit folk girls seemed to be putting a substantial burden on the mask. It began to peel and crumble apart.

There's no time, but...

She had no intention of making a half-hearted attack. Aishia evaded the attacks while focusing on refining her magic essence.

Just a little more...

Haste makes waste. Landing an attack on Aishia when she was focused on evasion was quite the backbreaking task. That being said, did it become suspicious of Aishia for approaching but never attacking?

The golem suddenly ignored Aishia. Perhaps it decided to tip the current equilibrium by going after the weaker Sara, Orphia, and Alma first, as it suddenly moved towards Sara, who was the closest.

"Ah!" Aishia immediately chased after the golem. However, once the golem began its acceleration, even Aishia couldn't catch up. The golem arrived where Sara was located over a hundred meters away in the blink of an eye.

Its initial velocity alone was close to the speed of sound. A solid object over two meters long moving at a speed like that didn't need any petty tricks to destroy something. Just a mere tackle was enough to crush Sara, but the golem gathered its destructive power in its fist and aimed at her body.

"Wha?!"

By the time Sara was able to react—even with her physical body enhanced—the golem was right before her.

Since she was a wolf werebeast, her highest initial velocity when running with her physical body enhanced easily surpassed a hundred kilometers per hour. Her fastest speed was over double that, and it was even higher right now with Miharu's magic raising her potential.

However, that was nothing to boast about against the golem, and her agility couldn't be put to use while riding her contract spirit anyway.

I'm going to die...

The moment Sara realized that, her body jerked upwards. Hel had suddenly leaped up to prevent her from being killed. As a result, the golem's fist was unable to land against Sara's body. Instead, the fist dug into Hel's side. Hel was immediately unable to maintain its material form and shattered into particles of light.

"H-Hel?!" Sara screamed as she was sent flying by the shock wave of the attack. As a spirit, Hel was able to regenerate unharmed with enough magic

essence, but the invisible pain from the damage it suffered would linger.

Right now, Hel was still reeling from being smashed apart. How much pain was it in? The damage would remain on its spirit form, hindering its movement even after regeneration, but the golem was unfazed. It closed in on Sara, who was still falling through the air, and swung its fist.

"No!"

Aishia flew over at a speed close to the speed of sound, using her kinetic energy to stomp down on the golem. She attempted to stomp the golem down and away, but a sharp pain coursed through her legs, making her frown.

"Guh..."

No matter how sturdy her physical enhancement made her body, the legs of humanoid living beings weren't made to withstand a stomp made close to the speed of sound.

Heavy...

Indeed, the golem was extremely heavy. Even though she had stomped on it at such a speed, the golem didn't even budge, much less fly away.

Furthermore, the golem's feather blades took that moment to target Aishia's back. It was only the portion that Sara had been dealing with, but the current situation meant they were free to move as they pleased.

Aishia noticed the incoming feather blades with a gasp. She hesitated, uncertain whether she should evade them.

"I won't let you!" Sara moved around behind Aishia, putting up a barrage. Water bullets fired at a rate of dozens per second, blocking the approach of the feather blades.

"Don't worry, I've got your back! Just focus on that thing!" Sara called out solemnly.

"Sorry." Aishia nodded and increased the force she was using to stomp down on the golem with.

Sara was speechless for a moment, then pouted. "You're meant to say 'thank you.'"

"Thank you," Aishia corrected herself with a soft smile.

Just then, the golem's tail extended towards Aishia's abdomen. It writhed just before making contact, which Aishia saw out of the corner of her eye.

"Wha..."

The golem's tail pierced sharply through Aishia's stomach. Sara gaped as she watched.

"I-I'm fine..." Aishia muttered. She then released the magic essence she had

been saving up from her right hand. The essence instantly transformed into condensed destructive energy.

This is what Celia used...!

Sara thought with a sparkle in her eyes. The destructive energy released from Aishia's right hand resembled the light flowing from Durandal that Celia had once used. No, the amount of essence appeared to have surpassed Celia's.

The golem instantly realized the danger of the attack. It attempted to withdraw its tail from Aishia and create distance between them, but Aishia grabbed its tail with her left arm to stop it. The golem tried to tear her away.—

"Ngh..."

The golem moved with an initial velocity close to the speed of sound and rapidly began to descend. No sooner had it done that, it changed directions and moved to the side, then diagonally upwards, then vertically—darting through the air, drawing a complex route. Despite flying with zigzag movements, its speed didn't fall in the slightest. If anything, it was getting faster and faster in the short span of time that had passed.

Still skewered by its tail, Aishia was violently flung around. A heavy force attacked Aishia's body with the complex change in trajectory. A roller-coaster ride was nothing in comparison. Any regular human would be long dead. Even Rio and Aishia normally avoided taking complex routes while moving at speeds close to the speed of sound. The burden on their physical bodies was too great, even when they enchanted them.

And yet, they had long surpassed the speed of sound. A sonic boom occurred, attacking Aishia's physical body.

"Y-You won't get away..."

Aishia's face twisted in pain as she clung onto the golem's tail. She hadn't expected the golem to obediently accept the attack in the first place. It was obvious it would attempt to evade any attack with actual force behind it.

On top of that, the golem's highest speed surpassed Aishia's. Although she had activated her spell to make the golem alert, she had no confidence in being able to hit it with her attack. But she still couldn't afford to miss.

Aishia took the majority of her remaining magic essence and gathered it in her right hand as destructive energy. There would be nothing left for a second shot, so she had to make sure this one hit her target.

"This way, it'll hit for sure."

This situation where they were closely stuck together was advantageous for her. Aishia pulled the tail towards her with her left arm and took aim with her

right hand.

The golem changed its trajectory while shaking its body fiercely in every direction. Sensing that Aishia didn't want the surface to be damaged, it gradually approached the ground using vertical and diagonal downwards routes. However, like threading a thread through a needle, Aishia took aim with perfect timing. Then, she released the destructive energy in the shape of a slash. She swung her right arm faster than the eye could follow, creating a glowing silver slash measuring a dozen-odd meters in length.

In the span of two to three seconds, the silver slash Aishia released dug into the golem's back. The sun was yet to fully rise in the dim sky, but the area was blindingly bright. It was as though the midday sun had appeared.

The force behind the slash was tremendous, digging deep into the armor that had been undamaged until now. Eventually, the light slash disappeared, leaving behind the golem's head and a portion of its lower body.

"I-It's over..." Sara muttered, gazing on from a distance.

With the disappearance of the main body, the feather blades the golem had been controlling started falling to the ground.

"Ugh..."

Aishia also drew out the tail pierced in her abdomen and toppled off-balance. She released the tail and began to fall.

"Look out!"

Sara, Orphia, and Alma all yelled at once, rushing to save Aishia from falling. While they were doing so, the feather blades and tail of the golem turned into particles of light and faded away.

The fastest was Orphia, who was riding Ariel through the air. They made a sudden descent to get ahead of Aishia, allowing Orphia to catch her in her arms.

"Are you okay?!" Orphia asked in a fluster.

Aishia replied weakly, pressing her stomach. "Yup. I've just used up my essence. The wound in my stomach isn't serious enough to force me out of my physical form. My legs hurt, but I'll be fine."

"I see... Thank goodness..." Orphia sighed in relief.

Her gaze was naturally drawn to Aishia's face peeking out from beneath the mask. The mask Aishia wore was over sixty percent cracked, allowing her divinely beautiful features to peek out.

Pretty...

Orphia's eyes widened in surprise.

"You did it!"

“Good job.”

Sara and Alma arrived belatedly, cheering in joy.

“Wonderful,” Orphia agreed. She nodded with a relieved smile.

Immediately after that, enough essence to shake the atmosphere swelled near the four of them.

“Wha?!” Aishia gasped while the spirit folk girls paled. Their gazes were all drawn to the origin of the magic essence.

“Don’t tell me...”

The worst possible scenario flashed through their heads—and emerged in reality. Like a spirit regenerating itself, the golem reappeared completely unharmed. Fallen, yet it had revived itself, and with it, disaster.

“No way...”

The spirit folk girls were at a loss for words. Aishia also frowned in silence. So this was what it meant to feel despair. Aishia had barely any essence left, and her mask was at its limit. There was no way she could fight it again.

As the sun rose over the capital, an invisible black barrier fell, but the hopelessness had only just begun.

“Huh...?”

Another source of essence shook the atmosphere; it appeared high above the capital.

“We were barely able to defeat one...”

And that one hadn’t even been defeated properly—yet now there were two?

Sara, Orphia, Alma, and even Aishia were all at a loss for words. Aishia didn’t have anything to say either.

How did they get out of this situation? Even if everyone could be evacuated, where could they run to? If only this were all just a bad dream. Many thoughts flashed through her mind, making one moment feel like infinity. But that one moment was quickly approaching its end...

Two calamities moved at once.

Like a god or a devil, here to punish humanity...

Chapter 3: Live or Die

Shortly before Aishia executed her final shot, in the skies far above the Galarc Castle, Reiss had a hand under his chin in thought as he observed the battle below.

Where did those two disappear to?

His mind was occupied with Celia Claire, the target he wanted eliminated the most, and Ayase Miharu, whom he hadn't considered a threat until just now.

Miharu had suddenly used the ancient magic of the Wise Gods, halting the golem in its tracks before teleporting everyone from the mansion to safety and then vanishing along with Celia.

That black-haired girl is Ayase Miharu, if I recall correctly. I thought she was summoned here along with the hero, but...

She was a completely unexpected force of nature. Reiss thought of the boy the Proxia Empire had newly welcomed as their hero—Sendo Takahisa.

Once I've returned to the Empire, I'll indirectly ask him *who the girl is. But there's something else I need to take care of first.*

The Wise God Lina must have something to do with their disappearance. But why isn't she showing herself in this situation? That woman should be able to defeat the golem, no matter how difficult...

Yet the Wise God Lina had placed Celia and Miharu in the firing line while withdrawing herself. At least, that's how things appeared in Reiss's eyes. What was the reason?

There must be some kind of circumstance preventing her from using her power freely, a reason she can't move of her own will...

Several possibilities came to mind, and Reiss narrowed his eyes as it felt like he was getting close to understanding the situation.

There isn't enough information to form a conclusion yet. Moreover, before I worry about where Lina went, I should think about why Ayase Miharu and Celia Claire disappeared.

Reiss couldn't afford to be distracted by Lina's absence right now. He sighed and racked his brain for where the two could have vanished to. Did they escape by themselves when they realized they had no chance against the golem? Or did

they hide to prepare something to turn the situation around?

Reiss's gaze fell to the rooftop garden of the Galarc Castle. The residents of the mansion that had been teleported away by Miharu were standing there. From Reiss's point of view, they seemed to be placed to lure the golem into attacking them, but—

It has to be a trap.

Reiss suspected that Lina had purposefully evacuated them to the conspicuous rooftop garden on purpose. He then frowned, realizing that was exactly what Lina wanted, and what made her so annoying to deal with.

To Lina, her power to see the future wasn't something to hide from her enemies. If anything, she was first to volunteer that information herself. After all, by informing her enemies that she knew the future, she'd be able to use all kinds of situations to her advantage. The cunning goddess was the only one in this world who had the ability to see into the future.

And so, if Miharu had been moving according to Lina's wishes, then the evacuation of the mansion residents to the rooftop garden of the castle could be interpreted as both a trap, or as her purposefully moving people she didn't want attacked somewhere they would be more likely to be attacked.

What a pain...as always.

He was left with no choice but to observe the situation closely. Perhaps even this situation was all part of Lina's plan to buy time.

Oh well. If it's a trap, then I'll just treat it as an opportunity to see what tricks she's got up her sleeve.

Reiss prepared himself for the worst and held out his right hand.

"*Vocare: Lutum Monstrum,*" he muttered.

One of the multiple rings on his hand glowed eerily, and a transparent orb several dozen centimeters in diameter appeared. Reiss touched the orb and poured his essence into it, and a moment later, the light of a complex spell formula began to appear around the orb.

It was right at that moment when Aishia's final attack landed on the golem. Her powerful slash took out a chunk of the golem's torso, causing it to fade on the spot.

I activated the golem with restrictions, and she put up a good fight. However...

Reiss watched the scene unfolding below with the leisure to widen his eyes in awe. He knew that the golem couldn't be defeated that easily. Aishia wouldn't have the strength left to defeat it again once it regenerated. At this rate, it would

only be a matter of time before the battle came to an end.

Just for insurance.

Reiss let go of the orb he was pouring his magic essence into. The light of the spell covering the orb disappeared, and an immense amount of essence started flowing out instead. The command input had been completed, and the second golem was activated.

The orb immediately vanished, and a humanoid combat weapon just like the one Aishia and the others had been fighting appeared. The overflowing essence wasn't something that could be hidden, so those below were quick to notice the second golem. It was just as the first golem regenerated too.

There were certain people whose deaths could mess up his future plans, and others that could become potential annoyances later, but Reiss decided against using any more unnecessary limitations.

Whether it was a hero or royal, kill anyone who gets in the way—that was the order he had given the golem.

"Now, it's time to get to work. Erase everyone in the rooftop garden."

As though responding to Reiss's call, the second golem began its descent towards the Galarc Castle.

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Meanwhile, as Reiss was deciding on sending the second golem into the fray, Miharu and Celia were still using the mana crystal to search for Rio's coordinates while deep beneath the Galarc Castle.

"This is bad. It's about time the second golem joins the battle," Miharu muttered, as though she knew what was going on aboveground.

Celia was stunned for a second, then repeated Miharu's words for confirmation. "Huh? S-Second? There's a second one?!"

It was doubtful whether they could stop even a single golem, and now there were two.

"Like I said, we have to hurry before it's too late," Miharu replied plainly.

"Will it still take time to summon Rio?"

"Yes. We need a little more time."

"Wouldn't it be better for one of us to return first, then?" Celia asked hesitantly, but—

"No, because I'm activating another sorcery at the same time. If either one of us leaves, the spell will be ruined."

Miharu curtly shook her head.

“Huh...?”

There was no physical tremor, but the torrent of magic essence that came pouring down from above was enough to give the illusion of the room shaking. Even without seeing the surface, it was easy to presume the second golem had appeared.

An intense look of impatience crossed Celia’s face. She was worried about those aboveground.

“Just so you know, even if we return to the surface, there’s nothing we can do besides delay the inevitable. It’d be one thing if it were one thousand years ago, but I’m just possessing this body with lowered specs right now, so I can’t defeat any golems.”

Miharu explained the situation to Celia in a nonchalant tone. She was aware that panicking wouldn’t help anything.

“Miharu... You said ‘before it’s too late’ earlier, right?”

“Yes, I did.”

“What kind of situation would be ‘too late’ in this case?” Celia asked with an air of frustration.

“I can’t answer that. The future I know cannot be shared with others like a fixed answer. I can only give advice without disclosing the exact details, or reveal things with enough room for interpretation...”

The implication in her choice of words suggested there were risks and limitations even in the case of exceptions.

“I see...”

Even so, Celia wanted to know the future; that was what her expression said.

“The future isn’t something for humans to know,” Miharu warned her.

“Why not?”

“The future is a series of possibilities. There are some futures that are close to absolute, but most futures can branch over the slightest thing. What will knowing the future do?”

The sudden question was abstract, but Celia considered her answer carefully. “If I knew every possible future, I’d try and grasp the best one possible,” she said.

“But what’s the best for someone could be the worst for someone else. Knowing the future could cause you to make decisions and change it for the worse. In order to reach the future you desire, you could be required to ignore someone else’s misery. Those who know the future are easily manipulated by it.

Then, they manipulate others."

Celia gulped, sensing an invisible weight to Miharu's words.

"In the first place, knowing every possible future is the domain of the gods. If a human tried to know every future, the amount of information would burn up their brain in an instant. The most you'd be able to handle is fragments of the most probable future."

Miharu paused after saying that much, then suddenly hurled a question at Celia. "So hypothetically speaking, if you had the power to see the future, would you use it to see which future you're most likely to get hitched with Rio in?"

"Huh?!" Celia immediately blushed.

"Hey, don't lose control of your essence. I'll go along with your chatter, but stay focused on the task."

"I-It's your fault for asking something so weird..."

Miharu laughed teasingly, making Celia turn away with reddened cheeks. "So what's the answer? Do you want to know which future is the one that you and Rio are most likely to get hitched?"

The color in Celia's cheeks receded as she paled. Unable to give an immediate answer, she fell silent for a while.

"You're afraid you won't be chosen," Miharu said, seeing through her thoughts.

"Ah..." Celia's eyes widened as though Miharu had hit the nail on the head.

"This is what you're thinking: if it isn't me, then who's most likely to get together with him? But what will you do once you learn what the most likely future is? Will you try and change the future so you can have him instead?"

Celia fell silent in hesitation.

"Like I said, the future is a series of possibilities. Even the most probable future could be changed over the slightest thing. Would you strive to change the future?" Miharu threw question after question at Celia, as though she was reading her thoughts.

"Maybe I don't want to know the future..." Celia eventually answered with a frown.

The more she thought about it, the more terrifying the idea of knowing the future and being able to change it was. It almost made her hate herself. It was better to do her best right now, without knowing the future.

"That's how humans should be. Humans cannot know the future. That is the absolute law of this world, the natural way of things. Breaking it would inflict terrible karma. That's why it's better for humans to know nothing of the future."

Was the dark shadow over Miharu's expression a figment of her imagination? Either way, it was only there for an instant.

"I knew you'd be there, Eru," Miharu suddenly muttered out of the blue.

"Huh?" Celia was puzzled.

"It's nothing. I've identified his exact coordinates. Here goes."

The light flowing out of the mana crystal increased in brightness, and a complex three dimensional spell formula appeared. Celia squeezed her eyes shut on reflex, when a thick pillar of light rose from the mana crystal and up towards the ceiling.

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Some time ago, back at the rooftop garden of the Galarc Castle, Satsuki and the others in the garden were able to see the intense aerial battle with the golem from afar. Aishia released a slash of light into the golem's back, blowing its body away and eliminating it.

"Yay! They did it!" Latifa cheered.

"Yes, it seems they've defeated it!" Liselotte said with a happy nod.

Everyone in the rooftop garden celebrated. Everyone other than Hiroaki, who was muttering under his breath as he anxiously watched the people cheering around him.

"Stop that. Celebrating early is just asking for trouble..."

"Haha, that only happens in anime and manga, bro," Masato said, teasing Hiroaki with a friendly grin.

In the sky above, Sara, Orphia, and Alma were rushing to Aishia as she lost balance and celebrating their victory. Hiroaki sighed in relief at the sight of that.

Immediately after, a new source of incredible magic essence appeared in the sky above Aishia and the others.

"What?!"

Gouki, Kayoko, and Aria promptly reached for their weapons. The others who could detect the magic essence all stiffened and looked up.

"I have a really bad feeling..." Satsuki said, face twitching.

"L-Look over there! The thing they just defeated is...!"

Liselotte was pointing at the first golem that had regenerated beside Aishia and the others in the air.

"There seems to be one more," Gouki said. The second one was higher in the sky than the naked eye could see, but he didn't miss its presence.

“See? It’s just like I said!” Hiroaki yelled, completely losing his composure. He glanced around frantically in search of an escape. But there was no telling when an attack would land on them and destroy the area.

Rather than fleeing inside the castle, it was probably safer to stay somewhere where the golem’s movements were visible and he could run whenever he wanted. Despite wanting to flee immediately, Hiroaki held his ground with a vexed look.

“Everyone, stay together. Sorcerers, set essence barriers in the air. Knights, take your positions and stay alert.” King Francois called over the figures nearby and gave orders to his sorcerers and knights to guard them.

“*Magicae Murum*.” The royal sorcerers set up layers of essence barriers of light overhead to protect them from any attacks.

Immediately after, the second golem descended upon the rooftop garden so fast, the sound of its arrival was left behind. No sooner had it done so, it softly came to a stop right above the floor of the roof, like a bird’s feather ignoring all air pressure and inertia.

It was a silent appearance unimaginable for its huge, two-meter large size. Its silver mechanical body released a divine radiance that, combined with its feathered wings, made it look just like a beautiful angel.

While everyone else was taken aback with fascination, Gouki immediately ran towards the golem.

“Ngh...!”

He was so fast, it was as if his legs had grown wings.

So light...

When he moved, he could feel it clearly: his physical body enhancement was at a much higher degree than usual. The cause of that had been Miharu, who had cast magic before disappearing with Celia.

Si vis pacem, para bellum legio.

Setting aside the question of why Miharu could use magic, the effect of her spell was extremely reassuring right now.

His initial velocity surpassed that of a werebeast warrior, who were far superior to humans in physical ability. But even then, the golem was faster. It hovered a hair’s breadth above the ground and glided towards Gouki.

Before he knew it, the swinging fist of the golem was right before his eyes. Its aim was locked onto his face with unmatched accuracy. In that instant, Gouki could see his head flying off in his mind. There was no time for him to even blink.

Even so, Gouki's katana was already moving. He was able to react thanks to his many years of combat experience, and his potential that had been increased by Miharu. If he had lacked any one of these things, he would have died to that strike just now.

"Guh...!" Gouki forced the side of his katana into the golem's arm and swung it, using the recoil to move his body aside.

Immediately after, the golem's fist passed by the side of Gouki's face. The golem's fist created a strong tremor in the air that shook Gouki's eardrum, making him frown. But he couldn't afford to take his eyes off the golem. He turned to face the golem and kept its body within his field of view. When facing it from this close, its presence and essence made him want to step back. But he had approached the golem in the first place in order to make the first move.

"Hmph!"

Gouki boldly swung his katana down. On top of reducing his movements to the utmost extent, his supersonic strike was sharp enough to easily slice through rock. Any regular opponent would struggle to react, but the golem's sharp pointed tail swayed. It shot forward, aimed right at Gouki's katana.

Gouki extended his swing to continue slashing at the golem. But the golem's tail could move freely like a whip, preventing him from doing so. Its main body didn't budge in the slightest, as though to say its tail was enough of an opponent for him.

In fact, Gouki was unable to get any closer past the tail. The moment he stepped within reach, the tail would shoot towards him, and it was all he could do to deflect that. If he stepped too far into its range, he could see himself being sliced into two. And if he went even further into the range of the golem's arms...

This could be bad...

He couldn't see any chance of winning. He was swinging his katana with all his might, but he couldn't see the depths of the golem at all. His hand was going numb from the impact, and it was dubious whether he could keep up with the speed of the tail.

Gouki broke out in a cold sweat. "I will draw this one away! Retreat to somewhere out of its sight now!" he yelled at those standing behind him.

It was dangerous to evacuate inside when the golems' attacks could cause a collapse at any moment, but with the golems right beside them, it was safer than remaining here.

However, the golem wasn't about to wait patiently for them to move. The next moment, the feather blades separated from its wings and scattered through

the air.

“Place all barriers towards the front!” Francois immediately ordered the royal sorcerers.

All the sorcerers moved the light barriers they had cast overhead to surround Satsuki and the others instead. But before the barriers completely blocked them off, Gouki’s wife, Kayoko, and Liselotte’s attendant, Aria, stepped outside of them.

“I will team up with my husband to lure the blades away!”

“Everyone, use this chance to retreat to safety!”

Kayoko and Aria gave orders for retreat and split into two directions as though they were moving in sync. The majority of the feather blades swiftly followed after them. Countless blades approached at a rapid rate; not even Kayoko or Aria could deal with them directly. They focused solely on keeping their feet moving, luring the feathers after them as much as they could.

Gouki, Kayoko, and Aria were risking their lives to buy time. The problem was whether there was a refuge inside the castle that was both out of sight of the golem and not at risk of collapsing from an attack.

“Everyone, fall back. There’s a royal escape passage underground. We can evacuate there,” King Francois said.

A royal escape passage was only used to abandon the castle in an emergency. It was a place meant to be kept an absolute secret to outsiders, but Francois must have deemed the current situation to be an emergency.

“Hmph!” Gouki swung his katana frantically to keep the golem pinned as long as possible.

“Look out, your back is unguarded!” Kayoko yelled. She noticed that a portion of the feather blades were approaching him from behind.

“Guh!” Gouki had no choice but to leap to the side. The feather blades made perpendicular turns to avoid hitting the golem’s main body and followed his movements. As a result, Gouki was forced away from the golem, setting it free.

Oh no!

Gouki promptly tried to approach the golem again, but the feathers pursuing him didn’t allow him to do so.

Immediately after, the golem closed in on Francois and the others who had already commenced retreating. It swung its arm, smashing through the barrier like it was shattering glass.

The sorcerers quickly moved the remaining essence barriers around them before the golem. At that moment, the golem’s strong arm swayed, and its fist

burst forward, smashing through the new barriers one after another.

All the barriers were broken through in a mere few seconds, leaving Francois and the others within completely undefended.

“Protect His Majesty!” a knight inside the barriers yelled. All the knights stepped forward to form a human shield.

“Move it!” Satsuki yelled. She charged at the golem, thrusting forward her spear-shaped Divine Arms that she had materialized.

“Haaah!”

Wind like a condensed storm was released forward from the tip of the spear. A terrible gale blew fiercely in an attempt to force the golem back.

And while the raging winds blew around the golem, blocking its vision, Liselotte and Christine both decided to cast a spell at the same time.

“Ictus Lancea.”

“*Fulgur Sphera*.”

A thick lance of ice and intense bolt of lightning were sucked into the wind and attacked the golem.

“Ictus Lancea.”

“*Fulgur Sphera*.”

Seeing that, Lilianna and Charlotte also cast the same spells, providing more support. The other sorcerers also began casting spell after spell into the storm surrounding the golem.

“Now’s your chance! Quickly...!”

“Get inside,” was what Satsuki was about to yell at the people behind her. But at that moment, something struck her chest with a thump. The feeling was accompanied by the sensation of her body floating.

“Huh...?” Satsuki slowly looked down.

The golem’s tail had extended through the wind and pierced through her chest. There was a hole opened right through her chest, which the tail was using to lift her up.

The Divine Arms spear slipped out of Satsuki’s hand. The raging wind extending from its tip vanished as she let go of the spear. The falling spear clattered to the floor and disappeared into particles of light like a spirit turning into its spirit form.

“Satsuki!”

Latifa, Masato, and Aki screamed.

“Ah...”

Oh, I’m dead was the thought that crossed Satsuki’s mind.

Everyone's going to be worried. I have to tell them it'll be okay. Thoughts rapidly flashed through her head.

"E-Everyone...run..."

With a pale face, Satsuki smiled at Latifa and the others, but the golem flicked its tail as though to say such sentiments were worthless, flinging Satsuki's body aside. Her body fell heavily to the ground, and it rolled across the floor of the garden and stopped moving. A large amount of blood was flowing from the hole in her chest, creating a puddle of blood.

Masato's eyes turned bloodshot with anger as he grabbed his Divine Arms sword. Latifa wasn't armed with a weapon, but she clenched her fists and readied herself for combat.

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“H-Hey, you guys!” Hiroaki called out to stop them. The golem’s combat power was painfully evident. There was no way they had any chance of winning. Challenging it would just result in unnecessary deaths.

Of course, Masato and Latifa understood that too—the fear was clear in their side profiles. Even so, their eyes burned with fighting spirit, unwilling to forgive the golem. But there were some things in this world that couldn’t be dealt with using feelings alone. The golem was the embodiment of that.

“Everyone...!”

Above the castle, Aishia, Sara, Orphia, and Alma were busy dealing with the first golem that had regenerated. Exhausted from the earlier battle, Aishia was struggling just to evade the attacks. She couldn’t save those in the garden even if she wanted to, and there was a look of panic on her usually emotionless face.

It was a hopeless situation. The golem standing before Latifa and the others was unharmed from the attacks they had launched at it. It spread the wings of light on its back and formed enough spears to blow away everyone on the roof.

There was nowhere to run. It was at that moment that a thick pillar of light rose from a corner of the rooftop garden.

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Chapter 4: Counterattack Signal

In the rooftop garden of the Galarc Castle, a huge pillar of light stretched up to the sky. The wondrous sight captured everyone's gazes, almost making them forget about the precarious situation they were in.

However, there was an odd sense of déjà vu to the scene.

"A hero summoning...?" Christina mumbled in confusion.

Indeed, the pillar of light was terribly similar to that of a hero summoning. The golem turned its body away, wary of the pillar of light. The spears extending from its wings were aimed at the pillar, ready to fire at any moment.

Two figures appeared within the light as it faded. It was a boy in his late teens and a young girl standing beside him.

"Who...?"

In other words, it was Rio and Sora, who should have been in the Holy City Tonerico of the Almada Kingdom. But those in the rooftop garden didn't know who Rio and Sora were. They blinked at them blankly in shock.

"Where are we?"

Meanwhile, Rio and Sora were just as confused. After all, as mentioned already, the two of them were just in the Holy City Tonerico of the Almada Kingdom mere moments ago. They had just encountered the priestess named Eru at the entrance of the labyrinth by the city, and now...

The Galarc Castle? Why...?

Rio's eyes widened as he realized they had returned to the Galarc Castle, far from the Holy Kingdom of Almada. Then, he noticed the disastrous spectacle around them.

Rio's face fell as he spotted Satsuki lying in a puddle of blood with a large hole in her chest. His gaze immediately froze over with anger.

When he saw Masato with his sword and Latifa with her fists clenched for combat, he understood that the culprit was the golem they were facing. He could also see Aishia being pressured by another golem in the sky above them.

"Wh-Why is that thing here?! Dragon Ki— Master Rio...!"

Shocked by the sight of the golems, Sora immediately tried to report something to Rio. But when she saw how furious the normally gentle Rio was,

she swallowed her words.

The golem seemed to be aware that Rio and Sora were no ordinary people. It watched them with a cautious glare, calling back the feather blades that were attacking Gouki, Kayoko, and Aria.

Gouki, Kayoko, and Aria used that chance to return to Latifa and Liselotte to strengthen their defenses.

“Sora, can you protect everyone?” Rio asked, taking out a mask from his breast pocket.

“Yup! Leave it to me!” Sora replied energetically.

Rio instantly vanished from where he stood. Everyone’s eyes widened in shock; it almost looked like he had teleported. But the golem was able to follow Rio’s rapid speed and turned to face him immediately.

“*Dissolvo*.”

Rio had moved beside Satsuki and was taking a sheet out of his Time-Space Cache. He wrapped her in the sheet, covering the hole in her chest, and gently picked her up in his arms. Just then, a telepathic message from Aishia reached him.

Haruto... I’m sorry I couldn’t protect everyone—I couldn’t protect Satsuki.

She sounded quite regretful as she apologized to him.

It’s not your fault, Aishia.

Rio replied immediately. At the same time, the feather blades the golem had called back all shot towards him. Countless orbs of light immediately appeared around Rio and flew towards the golem, repelling each of the feather blades approaching him. Of course, the feather blades were unharmed by such an attack.

“Wha...”

Christina, Liselotte, and the others watching on were all rendered speechless, but it was only the beginning. Rio vanished once again, this time with Satsuki in his arms, and reappeared beside the dumbfounded group on the rooftop.

“Satsuki is alive,” he said to them.

“Huh?” Everyone reacted with disbelief. Although the wound was currently hidden behind the sheet, they had all witnessed the golem’s tail opening a hole through her chest. Her heart and lungs should have been torn apart, causing enough damage to instantly kill her. It was hard to imagine her still being alive after that.

“She’ll regain consciousness soon, but let her rest for now. I’ll take care of that thing. It won’t lay a hand on anyone else,” Rio said quietly.

The golem spread its wings of light as though to rise to the challenge. The wings glowed brightly as the spears all fired towards Rio.

“Master Rio!”

“I know!”

Sora yelled as she held out a hand at the golem. Rio did the same.

Immediately after, countless spears of light hurtled towards them. They struck one after another, causing a series of fierce explosions.

“Ahh!”

Light burst brightly, forcing many of those watching on to clench their eyes shut. The blast had enough force to blow apart the average human.

“Huh...?”

But everyone noticed the lack of pain they felt and gingerly opened their eyes. Rio and Sora stood before them, casting a barrier of light together. That was apparently strong enough to block all the light spears. The barrier was also angled to direct all the shock waves upwards, minimizing the damage to the floor.

Just then, the golem suddenly appeared right before Rio, swinging its fist at the barrier. Shock waves surged, causing a small earthquake on the floor.

However, there was so much essence poured into the barrier between Rio and Sora, not even a crack appeared at the golem’s punch.

“Wow...”

As fellow spirit art casters, Komomo and Sayo understood how hard it was to create such a strong barrier. They gulped in awe.

“Sora, I’ll take care of this guy. It seems to be quite troublesome. Could you go assist Aishia?” Rio asked, glaring at the golem.

“Understood. These guys are golems created by the Wise Gods, so please be careful.” Sora nodded anxiously and gave him an explanation.

“This thing is...?”

Sora had mentioned that they were once disciples of the Seven Wise Gods the first time he met her. And now there was one right before him. Rio took a deep breath.

“Sorry, it might be a very dangerous fight...” he said, worrying for Sora’s safety.

“Wh-What are you saying?! There’s no way we’d lose to these guys! Sora will clean that guy up with Aishia in no time at all!” Sora said proudly. “See you later!”

She rose into the sky and flew away. The golem manipulated its feather

blades into going after her, but Rio deployed numerous orbs of light to intercept the feathers.

As a result, the golem's feathers were all deflected by the orbs, and Sora safely reached Aishia and the others. The golem shot Sora a sidelong glance.

"Hey."

Rio had moved before the golem in the blink of an eye. Then, with a right fist wrapped in wind spirit arts, he punched the golem in the abdomen. In that instant, condensed wind exploded, blowing the golem's body back by a meter.

"Pay attention," he said in a cold voice.

He kept moving forward to keep the golem's attention on him, this time throwing his left fist forward.

Rio activated the wind spirit arts wrapped around his left hand, but the golem only backed away a little this time. By backing away at the moment of impact, it killed the momentum behind Rio's attack.

There was enough force to blow an unguarded human to pieces, but the golem only shifted slightly. At that moment, Rio understood how abnormal his opponent was.

Meanwhile, golem seemed to have determined Rio was a greater threat than the others, as it took its attention off Sora and glared at him with its eerily glowing gaze. Its tail wavered like a mirage, taking aim at Rio's heart. But the wind spirit arts around Rio's right hand accurately smashed into the tip of the tail, diverting its trajectory astray.

It pierced Satsuki's heart with this tail...

Rio realized how the hole in Satsuki's chest had gotten there and frowned bitterly. He would be the one to punish it.

"I will be your opponent."

He stood before the golem, determined to protect the people behind him.

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High in the sky above the Galarc Castle, Rio's and Sora's summoning had put a temporary stop to the golem attacking Aishia and the spirit folk girls. However, once the golem on the rooftop garden began attacking Rio, the golem in the sky resumed its attack on Aishia. Feather blades danced through the sky under its control.

"...!" Aishia instantly used her wind spirit art to push her physical body into accelerating towards the golem. Sara, Orphia, and Alma were unable to react to

the golem's speed fast enough, so she decided that she had to be the one to put a stop to it.

Fortunately, thanks to Rio being summoned nearby, he was able to transfer essence to her through their contract path. It was more effective to have physical contact with the contract holder, so she couldn't recover all her lost essence in a single go.

I can keep fighting like this.

It had the boon of giving her much more leeway with her magic essence. Thanks to that, she could heal the injuries on her abdomen and legs that she had been ignoring in favor of using her essence on flying.

Although it wasn't a hindrance to maintaining a physical body, the pain spirits felt in their incarnated body could potentially reduce their physical ability. It would have been quite harsh on Aishia to fight with a hole in her abdomen, but she was able to move sharply now that she was healed.

However, though it was easier for her to fight, it didn't change how formidable of an opponent the golem was. She had only been able to land an effective hit earlier thanks to Sara, Orphia, and Alma diverting its attention.

Which was why she was still forced to focus her efforts into defensively evading its attacks. But this time, Rio's and Sora's reassuring presences kept her calm.

"Haaah!"

It was at this moment that Sora left Rio's side and ran over to support Aishia. She flew over faster than the speed of sound, shooting up from below to land a punch against the golem with her partially materialized dragon body.

The golem's body that had been unharmed until now was easily blown back over ten meters. Its momentum eventually diminished and it came to a stop. There had been significant force behind the punch, as the area where it was hit was dented.

"Wha..."

Sara and the other girls were wide-eyed in amazement.

"Hey, Aishia! You're just gonna be in the way with a tattered mask like that. Go to the Dragon King's side. Sora will take care of this." Sora came to a stop before the golem as she called out to Aishia behind her.

"This is a really dangerous opponent..." Aishia said hesitantly. Although she was worried about Rio fighting below them, she was also concerned about Sora fighting alone.

"Oh? Do you think Sora needs your concern?"

Aishia silently conveyed her affirmation through her gaze, which Sora noticed when she looked over her shoulder.

“Sora is well aware of how dangerous this opponent is. Which is all the more reason you should go to the other fight, where there are more hindrances. You’re not going to make Master Rio fight alone in such a situation, are you?” She shrugged in exasperation and waved her hand to shoo Aishia away.

“Got it... Thank you for coming to save me, Sora,” Aishia said to her back.

“H-Huh?! I-It’s not like Sora came here for your sake!” Sora snapped with a blush. But when she looked over her shoulder, Aishia was no longer there. She had already started moving towards Rio.

“We’re going to descend, you three. You can leave this one to Sora,” Aishia called out to Sara and the others on her way down to the rooftop garden.

“Huh? Um, but...”

Sara, Orphia, and Alma’s gazes looked over at the blushing Sora. They seemed reluctant to leave such a small child behind—which was a sensible reaction to have. The force behind her punch had been stupendous, but her appearance was still that of a helpless little girl.

“Hmph. As usual, you make no sense.”

Being relied on and thanked by someone was new to Sora, which was probably why she turned her head away shyly.

Meanwhile, the spirit folk girls were hesitant about what to do. They gazed at the back of the small figure floating before them.

“Hey, you three,” Sora called out without looking back.

“Huh?”

“You’re in the way. Get out of here,” she ordered.

“But...” Sara and the others still hesitated. Just then, the golem instantly repaired the dent in its armor from Sora’s attack and moved close to her. The spirit folk girls only noticed it after it had closed the distance to and finished swinging its fist. However, Sora’s partially materialized dragon arm was able to catch the golem’s powerful fist directly. The golem silently attempted to push its fist forward, but Sora pushed back with just as much strength.

Sara, Orphia, and Alma were speechless, watching on with bated breath.

“Do you get it now? If you weren’t able to react to this thing’s movements just now, you’ll just be in the way. Hurry up and run,” Sora urged them.

“I understand... Let’s go.”

Sara bit her lip in vexation, but she wasn’t immature enough to avoid seeing reality for what it was. Sensing the gap in their ability, she called for Orphia and

Alma to retreat. Orphia and Alma nodded with bitter looks and began to descend.

"Hmph, now Sora can fight to her heart's content."

Sora huffed and glared at the golem she was facing. The golem then manipulated its feather blades to attack the girls that were descending.

Sora immediately released the golem and vanished. Dragon wings materialized on her back, allowing her to fly faster than the feather blades and slap them away before they could reach the girls.

"How dare you look away while facing Sora!"

Sora charged towards the golem once again, flapping her wings. At the same time, another huge pillar of light rose from the Galarc Castle.

"Huh...?"

Sora came to a screeching stop and stared at the pillar. The golem's gaze was similarly drawn to the light, but there was something about this pillar that was different from the one that summoned Rio and Sora before.

The pillar of light that had summoned them had been too bright to see through, but the one rising now was transparent. In addition to that, this new pillar of light came to a stop after rising to a certain height and started expanding outwards, covering the entire city like a dome.

A barrier? But there's no human out there that can cast a barrier of this ridiculous scale... Are they using the ley line of the land?

Sora quickly analyzed what was happening using the knowledge she had already.

Wait, don't tell me—was it Lina? Or another Wise God?

When considering who could have activated the barrier, Lina and the other Wise Gods were the first to come to mind. The fact that the golems—weapons once created by the Wise Gods—were here also supported the theory of the Wise Gods being involved.

"What on earth is happening?"

Sora frowned in annoyance and returned her gaze to the golem.

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Meanwhile, in the sky far above where Sora was fighting...

"I've been had..."

Reiss was stuck outside of the barrier. He had a rare frown of displeasure on his face as he sighed and formed an essence bullet at his fingertips. He fired it at

the barrier, but the moment it made contact, it burst and scattered.

A barrier to prevent external entry and defend against attacks, I see. It probably has other effects too... That woman has no intention of hiding her involvement after all.

A barrier of this scale couldn't be activated on the spot. It had to have been prepared long in advance. Either way, as long as this barrier was here, Reiss was split from the two golems he had deployed.

It may be possible to destroy the barrier if I deployed the third golem, but...

The problem was what would happen after breaking the barrier and getting inside. He didn't know what other traps were prepared, and Rio and Sora had been summoned within the barrier already. Not even the golems could stand a chance against the Dragon King that Reiss knew. All they could do was buy time. It would be foolish to continue deploying his forces without any chance of victory.

However, Rio wasn't the Dragon King that Reiss knew one thousand years ago. There was no telling how much of the Dragon King's power he could use.

Two golems should be a good test of how irregular his combat power is. Although that changes my original goal quite a bit.

He should use this chance to evaluate him—it was the least he could do after his plans to use golems to eliminate Celia and the others in Rio's and Sora's absence had been ruined by their summoning.

I'm also curious about what that woman will do next...

With that, Reiss decided to watch over the fight within the barrier instead.

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Meanwhile, deep beneath the Galarc Castle.

"What was the sorcery you just activated?" Celia asked Miharu, who was standing beside her as she gazed in awe at the mana crystal floating in the middle of the room.

"A barrier that isolates the inner area from the outer area. This will prevent any new forces from infiltrating. We've succeeded in summoning Rio and Sora, so we've passed the first checkpoint," Miharu said, beaming smugly. It was an expression she would never show under normal circumstances.

"I see..."

Which was why Celia blinked as she stared at Miharu's face.

"What? Now that we're past the first checkpoint, we have a little space to

breathe. I'll answer any questions you have as long as you keep your magic essence under control," Miharu said, noticing Celia's gaze.

"It's just—you're nothing like the Miharu I know..."

She had a faint idea of what was happening to Miharu right now, but with the situation being what it was, she hadn't sought any confirmation. But now that she had been told the first checkpoint was passed, Celia shot Miharu a searching look.

"Of course. I'm not her, after all. Don't lump us together," Miharu muttered in disgust.

"Don't lump you together... So am I talking to the Wise God Lina herself right now? Not Miharu speaking on Lina's behalf?"

Celia made an accurate guess of the situation based on the information she gained from their conversation.

"Ayase Miharu's consciousness has completely withdrawn back. She has no idea what's happening right now. Did you think she was speaking with the memories of the Wise God Lina?"

"Oh, um... Y-Yes. But wait... Huh?"

The Wise Gods were figures of worship in the Strahl region. Celia adjusted her tone, thinking it would be bad to speak to Lina like how she normally spoke to Miharu. But then she tilted her head curiously, realizing something odd about that.

"Is it strange for the Wise God Lina, who reincarnated into Ayase Miharu, to have a different personality to Ayase Miharu?" Miharu—no, Lina asked, guessing Celia's question before she could ask it.

"Yes... I was told that people who leave this world through reincarnation or teleportation cannot keep their memories... Rio didn't have the memories of the Dragon King, so how come you do? And as a separate personality..."

"I'm not the only one. Aishia regained her memories too, no?"

"Oh..."

Now that she mentioned it, that was true. Aishia had regained the memories Lina copied to her in the middle of the battle with Saint Erica, creating the opportunity for Rio to awaken as a transcendent one.

"There are exceptions to everything," Lina said with a meaningful smile. "That said, the way Aishia and I retrieved our memories is different. I've kept my personality along with my memories. It's a long story, so I'll keep my explanation brief for now. You know the spell you recently learned that allows you to assume an alter ego? I used a variation of that magic to possess this girl.

My abilities are drastically lesser compared to my former self, and I can't use any powers since I'm no longer a transcendent one."

"Does that mean you're a split personality?"

"I guess so. The main personality is Miharu, so I can't come out unless the possession magic is used."

"I was shocked when Miharu suddenly started using powerful spells one after another."

After all, Miharu was a spirit art caster, and spirit art casters couldn't learn magic. If they did, they were no longer able to use spirit arts. There was no way Celia wouldn't be surprised to see her using magic out of the blue.

"They're still wasted on this girl, though."

"R-Really?"

"It's all magic she can't use. Even if she could, her personality isn't suited for conflict, so you'd just end up annoyed at how meek she is, no?"

"Th-That's not true... She's a really nice girl."

"It is. That's why I have to stand in for her," Lina said with a sigh.

Even though it's the girl I reincarnated into...

Celia stared at Lina, surprised to hear her degrade the girl whose body she was possessing.

"Like I said already, I'm not that girl. We may share the same soul, but our personalities are separate. That's why I consider that girl a different person to myself," Lina said, as though she could guess what Celia was thinking.

"But even if you say that...I can't really see it that way..."

She had reincarnated as Ayase Miharu, yet she didn't consider herself Ayase Miharu. It was a little too confusing for Celia, who had a strained smile on her face.

"Really? It's the same as your beloved Rio, isn't it? He considers himself Rio, not Amakawa Haruto. And definitely not the Dragon King. Well, in his case, his personalities as Amakawa Haruto and Rio have smoothly merged with each other, which probably affects his outlook."

"That's true..."

Amakawa Haruto was dead, and Rio was his current self. This was what Rio had told Celia himself, so that was something she could understand.

"Wait, what do you mean by beloved..."

Celia's snow-white cheeks reddened like ripe peaches. She pouted adorably.

"Seeing the way you easily accept anything to do with him, love is truly blind," Lina said with a teasing smile.

Celia was unable to say anything.

“Besides, you’re the same too,” Lina added.

“Huh?” Celia tilted her head, unable to comprehend the sudden information.

“You’re the reincarnation of my disciple. How does it feel hearing that? Do you consider yourself the same person as my disciple?”

“I... I do not. I don’t have any memories of that...” Celia said, shaking her head hesitantly. There was nothing left of that disciple’s memories, so it was only natural for her to think that.

“In the first place, reincarnation sorcery is a technique used to be reborn as a different person. A body can only hold one soul. That’s why reincarnation sorcery fuses the soul of the person who wants to be reincarnated with the soul about to be born. Do you know what this means?”

“That the person born from reincarnation was originally a separate person to the one who wanted to be reincarnated? In other words, regardless of the one who wanted to be reincarnated, they would have been born anyway?” Celia said, forming her answer from the information she was given.

“Correct. So in my case, Ayase Miharu would have been born even if I didn’t reincarnate. That’s why it’s only natural for me to consider myself as a separate person to Ayase Miharu. Even my personality is separate from hers.”

Sure enough, Lina gave Celia’s answer a gold star, adding her perspective on top.

“That’s what I find strange, though. If most people can’t keep their memories or personality like you, what’s the point of reincarnating?”

“The point is to increase one’s talent and abilities after reincarnation. Transcendent powers and magic spell formulas can be inherited too. The Claire family was originally a notable family of sorcerers, but your exceptional sense as a sorcerer is because of my disciple fusing with your soul.”

“But even if the soul is fused, if there’s nothing left of the memories and personality from before reincarnation, that person from the past life is as good as gone, no? Why would you reincarnate if there’s nothing left behind?”

“That depends on the individual, don’t you think? In fact, the memories that remain after reincarnation all depend on the spell formula used beforehand. Of course, it’s restricted to those born or reincarnated into this world.”

Those who were born in this world couldn’t choose to reincarnate in another world with their memories. This was the basic premise behind why Rio didn’t have any memories of the Dragon King, but still had memories of Amakawa Haruto.

Then the reason I've lost my memories of being Lina's disciple despite being reincarnated into this world is because...

That disciple herself had chosen not to leave any memories behind. Is that what Lina was saying? Celia wondered to herself.

"For the record, it's also possible to designate the timing of when one will inherit their powers and spell formulas, you know? It'd be dangerous if a baby without any sense of self used their powers or magic unknowingly," Lina added.

"Then the reason I recently learned my new magic is because..."

The same applied to Rio and the powers he regained while fighting Saint Erica. Was it all prepared in advance in their reincarnation sorcery?

"Yes, it was decided in the reincarnation sorcery that you would obtain those spells at that exact point in time. The trick needed for you to regain your memories of Rio and Aishia was also activated at the same time."

"I knew it..." Celia had a look of understanding on her face, like she had found the missing piece of the puzzle. "Then if you use that trick on the others, they should be able to regain their memories of Rio and Aishia too, right?!" she said, looking at Lina hopefully.

"That isn't possible."

"Huh...?"

Why? Celia wondered, looking like a kicked puppy as her face fell.

"Or rather, there's no need for that. We're going to use another loophole to get out of this situation."

"Another loophole...?"

"There are other ways of evading the rules of god."

"Oh...!" The light of hope returned to Celia's eyes.

"We're about to activate the sorcery for that now. It'll help defeat the golems above us as well."

"Are they a difficult opponent to defeat even with Rio and Sora here?"

"There's no doubt they're a troublesome opponent to face. Destroying the golem's armor isn't enough, since they'll keep regenerating until they run out of magic essence. And the ones on the surface would have saved a thousand years' worth of essence."

"A-A thousand years of essence? How many times would they have to be destroyed for their saved essence to run dry?"

A chill ran down Celia's spine.

"They've probably used a month's worth at this point, I'd say?"

"That's all...?"

Celia once again realized just how dangerous the golems were.

“Not even the transcendent ones would want to deal with them directly. Well, the Dragon King can defeat them easily with his annihilation powers. He could even eliminate the saved essence within the golems directly. It’s such a cheat-like ability. We’re lucky he’s on our side,” Lina said gleefully.

“But aren’t the transcendent powers...”

Unlike Lina, Celia frowned with uncertainty. She had been told that using the powers placed a huge burden on the human body and soul.

Besides, transcendent ones had to use their power for the sake of the world as a whole. If they tried to protect a particular group or individual, they would forget who they were trying to protect. That was one of the rules of god.

Wearing the mask eased the burden of this penalty, but there was no telling how much of the recoil from using the powers for someone could be endured. It was possible for the mask to break in a single instant.

“Like I said, once this sorcery activates, the rules of god won’t be an issue anymore. He’ll be able to use his powers without losing his memories. But he’ll still have to endure the burden on his body and soul...”

Worried about the burden that would descend on Rio if he used his powers, a look of anxiety flashed across Lina’s face. But she sighed as though to dispel those feelings.

“At any rate, he’ll be able to fight without worrying about the penalties of breaking the rules if this sorcery activates. He won’t lose his memories even if he takes off his mask,” she said brightly.

“Wow...”

The rules of god that had troubled them so much would all but disappear. Celia swallowed her breath in awe.

“And so, I’m taking over from here. I can handle this by myself, so you go back up and pass on my message to him.”

“To Rio?”

“Yes. ‘Wait for my signal, then eliminate the essence within the golems using your power. But make sure you only use your powers within the barrier, and make sure you don’t use your powers more than two times in succession. It’d be ideal if you could take them both out in one go, but don’t endanger yourself trying. Finally, once the golems use up all their essence and cease moving, please retrieve the cores.’ Got it?” Lina conveyed to Celia.

“Uh. Um, yes. What’s the signal?”

“The moment the next sorcery activates. It’ll be obvious, so don’t worry

about it. *Transvectio*."

Lina uttered the spell and a magic circle appeared around Celia. The space distorted and Celia vanished with it, leaving Lina behind.

"I'm counting on you..." she muttered, gazing up at the tall ceiling.

After a while, she suddenly opened her mouth again.

"I'm going to disable all the taboos you decided upon now, father," she said, as though she was talking to someone who wasn't there. "My powers couldn't foresee the penalty for breaking the rules. But you foresaw this future, didn't you, father? How will you punish me for breaking the rules? Or have you forsaken this world and don't care about what I do anymore?"

Lina continued speaking, but no one responded.

"So you won't answer me after all. Then I shall break the taboos."

Lina continued gazing up at the ceiling in hope of a reply, but pulled herself together with a look of determination.

◇ ◇ ◇

In the rooftop garden of the Galarc Castle, Rio had just closed the distance to the golem to draw its attention. Both his hands and legs were wrapped in wind spirit arts as he attacked fiercely.

However, the golem wasn't about to take things quietly. When Rio appeared before it, it responded by thrusting its right hand out, aiming to pierce Rio's body with its claws.

Rio shifted to sidestep the attack. He tried to take out the golem's arm while doing so by aiming a sharp blow to its joint.

So heavy...

A dull sound echoed loudly. The golem didn't budge at all.

Then, as though it had predicted the moment of immobility after the punch, the golem's tail shot out past its side. It writhed like a snake as it swiftly neared Rio in an attempt to stab him. Rio used his opposite hand to grab the tip of the tail and smack it away.

Without any warning, the golem's left arm swayed with minimal movement, taking aim at Rio's face.

"Ugh..."

Rio twisted his body, evading the fist by a hair's breadth, before the feather blades being controlled by the golem shot at him from every direction. However, Rio turned like a spinning top, releasing a tornado from his body. The feathers

were blown off track, unable to tear apart his body.

The golem's raging attack continued. Rio had originally approached the golem in an attempt to draw it away from the rooftop garden, but before he knew it, he was forced to focus entirely on evading its attacks.

There was barely any time to breathe; it was clear why Aishia had struggled with this situation. Rio was experiencing firsthand how formidable of an enemy the golem was.

What was most troublesome was how it had a humanoid shape, yet it made free use of its nonhuman parts like its tail and feathers in addition to its arms and legs to attack. It made actions and attacks that weren't possible for humans, so it was harder to predict its movements. Yet at the same time, it made movements like a martial arts master, making it extremely difficult to fight. In fact, it wasn't an opponent that should be faced one-on-one in the first place—the difference in attack number was far too great.

It's so tough...

His attacks were striking the golem directly, yet it was completely unwounded. The golem continued making its attacks while receiving all of Rio's without batting an eye.

Despite that, Rio held his ground and even attempted to make counterattacks as he endured the golem's attacks. He had no intention of falling back. Satsuki was behind him, unconscious after receiving a fatal wound. He couldn't afford to retreat.

Meanwhile, Latifa and the others had fallen back behind Rio. Status was irrelevant: those who could use magic and spirit arts worked together to create essence barriers, maintaining the safe zone. Among them, Flora and Charlotte were busy casting healing magic on Satsuki's chest.

Christina was one of the ones casting the barrier. Although they were in the middle of a battlefield, her eyes were fixed on Rio as though time had stopped. An indescribable feeling of restlessness filled her chest.

What is this feeling? When I look at him, I feel...

Guilty? Grateful? Curious? There was an intense feeling of unrest in Christina's chest. It was as though feelings that had been suppressed for a long time had reached their limit and were threatening to burst.

There was something she had to tell that unfamiliar person fighting over there. She wished to return something to him that couldn't be returned. Christina moved the right hand she had held up to activate her magic and clenched her fist around the fabric of her dress as though to grasp that wish.

At the same time, there was someone else who was feeling strong emotions towards Rio: Latifa, who was casting an essence barrier beside Christina. Tears were flowing down her face before she knew it.

“Huh?” Latifa wiped her tears with her right sleeve in confusion. She didn’t know why she was crying herself. She just knew she felt an intense emotion when she looked at Rio.

Why? I don’t know that person...

Latifa didn’t know Rio. So why? Why was she filled with the urge to run over and hug him, even though it clearly wasn’t the time for that?

“I...” Liselotte mumbled beside Latifa. “I think I know that person...”

A name that didn’t exist in her memory was on the tip of her tongue, yet she couldn’t say it. Desperate to know the answer, Liselotte moved the hands she had stretched out to cast the essence barrier towards Rio and clenched them.

Latifa turned to her with a gasp. “You too, Liselotte?!”

“Both of you as well? Me too...” Christina said, joining their conversation.

The three exchanged a look of confusion.

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Just then, Aishia landed on the floor near the barrier the three of them were casting. She glanced at the barrier to check what was happening within.

"Um, would you like to come inside?" Liselotte asked.

"No, it's fine. I'm going to fight too."

Aishia shook her head and began to help Rio.

"Whoa!" Celia appeared within the barrier via teleportation.

"Celia?!"

"Where were you all this time?!"

Everyone inside the barrier reacted with shock.

"Ahaha... Sorry, I was busy activating some sorcery..."

How do I even begin to explain things...

Naturally, everyone rushed towards Celia, making her shrink back. Just then, she spotted Aishia standing outside the barrier.

"Ah, Aishia!" she called hurriedly.

"What?"

"I have a message for you: At the signal, use your powers on the enemies. If you erase the magic essence stored within them, they'll cease moving. But stay within the barrier!" Celia passed on the message Lina had given her to Aishia.

"Signal?"

"Apparently a large-scale sorcery is about to be activated, so that'll be the signal. She also wants you to retrieve the cores once you've defeated them."

"Got it."

"One last thing! Your powers can only be used twice in succession. If possible, try and defeat both of them in one go..." Celia's brow furrowed slightly as she stared at Aishia—she was worried about the burden of using the powers that would fall on Rio.

"All right. I'll be off now." Aishia nodded firmly in understanding and leaped up lightly. She then headed to where Rio was fighting the golem and approached from the side.

The golem was still making its fierce onslaught of attacks on Rio. Feather blades flew at Rio while the main body attempted to beat him up with close combat.

Rio deployed countless orbs of light around himself to fend off the golem's attacks. The incoming feather blades were deflected and flew around in wait for a new opening. Rio was aware Aishia had descended near them.

"Guh..."

He moved so that the golem was unable to see her. Aishia made her way

around to the golem's back and aimed a jumpkick at its head. The sharp strike from its blind spot made the golem lose postural control, and its upper body swayed violently. Out of caution against a follow-up attack, the golem immediately distanced itself from them.

"Haruto, I will fight with you." Aishia landed beside Rio. Rio took her hand and immediately began to transfer the essence in his body to her.

"Thank you. The other one above..."

"Is being handled by Sora."

The two shared information while holding hands.

"I see. It sure is reassuring to have her around."

Rio glanced overhead to see Sora fighting the other golem far in the distance.

"I have a message from Celia. A large-scale sorcery is apparently about to be activated. Wait for it, then use your transcendent power to erase the essence within the golem. But make sure to stay within the barrier."

"Is the ridiculously large barrier also Celia's doing?"

"It could be Miharu's. She was acting funny earlier."

"Miharu...?"

Rio's eyes widened. Now that he thought about it, he hadn't seen Miharu anywhere. He assumed she had been somewhere else.

Could it be Lina...?

"Let's talk about it later. Our first priority is to deal with this thing. We just have to buy time until the next sorcery is activated, right?" Now wasn't the time to be chatting away. Rio quickly pulled himself together.

"Yup. I destroyed its body earlier, but it repaired itself immediately. It can't be hurt by any superficial attacks. Be careful."

"Got it. For now, let's get it away from everyone else."

Just as Rio said that, the golem that had distanced itself sent its feather blades flying over to them.

"I'll create an opening. Leave the feathers to me too," Aishia said, releasing Rio's hand.

She had recovered a considerable amount of the essence she had consumed, and was able to deploy an abundant number of light orbs around them. Each one struck the incoming feather blades with perfect accuracy, deflecting them away.

"Thank you."

Leaving behind those words of gratitude, Rio started running. He condensed his magic essence around his fists as he closed the distance to the golem. Since he didn't have to worry about the feather blades anymore, he could afford to

activate powerful arts.

This guy's armor is thick.

An art that was merely big in scale wouldn't be enough—it needed the power to break through the armor.

In that case...

What he needed was penetrative power at a single point. He aimed to reduce the scale of the art and focus more on the might instead.

Of course, the golem wasn't just waiting patiently for him to move. It made use of their size difference and the hardness of its armor to force Rio into a corner.

Just then, the orbs of light being controlled by Aishia started falling on the golem like a meteor shower. It did barely any damage, but the golem's movements were slowed.

That single instant allowed Rio to sneak right up close to the golem, but the golem's tail reacted by sliding across the floor towards Rio. However, one of Aishia's light orbs struck the underside of the dimly glowing tail. Her unparalleled accuracy caused the tail to veer into another direction.

Amazing as always.

Rio was able to freely move close to the golem. The essence gathered around his fists was so dense, its blinding light was visible to the naked eye. He first swung his right arm, aiming a sharp punch at the golem's belly.

However, the golem seemed to deem that single blow capable of doing harm and made its first attempt to evade. It twisted its body with nimbleness that was unimaginable for its heavy metallic appearance. Rio's fist soared through the air.

It's not only big, but fast...

Rio's eyes rounded. The golem proceeded to spin away from him before making a sudden approach again. But Rio had already moved back within reach, and the destructive energy wrapped around his right fist was still present.

Rio took aim and swung his arm again. The golem bared its pointed claws and gathered magic essence at the tips, thrusting them out at Rio.

As a result, Rio's fist collided directly with the golem's claws. The essence they had both collected was released, creating a surge of light upon impact.

"Ngh...!"

Rio was sent reeling backwards through the air, but regained control of his balance with a single flip.

It'll be impossible to face this thing with pure strength... he thought as he was upside down.

Rio pushed off the floor with his right hand and distanced himself from the golem. He spotted the golem approaching him—its inherent weight had made it indifferent to the impact of their collision, allowing it to pursue him freely.

The next moment, Rio slid to the side while in his handstand position. The movement should have been impossible under the laws of physics, but he had activated his flying spirit arts to do so. The feather blades showed signs of raining down upon him, but Aishia obstructed them using her orbs of light.

"Ugh..."

In the blink of an eye, a dazzling exchange of blows happened. Rio and Aishia showed off their advanced teamwork, and the onlookers within the barrier held their breaths in awe.

"Wow..." Masato mumbled. The battle unfolding before him was at such a high level, it felt like it was on another dimension. His gaze of admiration was fixed on Rio, who stood undaunted before the fallen angel wreaking havoc.

Rio corrected his posture upon landing and approached the golem again. Essence was once again gathered around his right fist, which he released in an extra large blast.

The golem swung its fist, repelling the blast attack easily. But the blast had another purpose: stalling and distraction. Rio lowered his posture and ran beneath his blast towards the golem.

Wary of Rio's approach from its blind spot, the golem flew backwards to distance itself from him. But just as the golem started to rise up into the air, it lost balance as though someone had yanked on its leg. Its leg had been frozen to the ground. Rio had activated the spirit art by touching the floor as he ran.

Immediately after, Rio's left fist slammed into the golem's jaw with an immense amount of magic essence. The condensed destructive energy flowed out of his hand and swallowed the golem's head. He had saved as much of his essence as he could in his left hand and released it in a single blow. The essence had been condensed to the point of bursting out of control and dispersing, so maintaining it had been a backbreaking effort in itself. A single mistake when activating it could have resulted in an explosion that would have destroyed Rio's hand, so there was no doubt it packed a punch.

A sound resembling crackling lightning could be heard before the light Rio released faded. The golem's head had completely vanished.

"All right!" Masato yelled, pumping his fists in celebration.

But the next moment, the missing head began to repair itself. It must have been emitting an intense heat, as the ice at its feet melted instantly. Furthermore,

the golem was still swinging its fists in an attempt to attack Rio.

"Guh...!" Rio quickly leaped backwards.

It repaired its missing head in an instant. Good grief...

When Aishia said it had repaired its destroyed body instantly, he had hoped they would have better results by blowing apart its head, but...

Does it not have any weaknesses?

There was no telling whether there was a limit to how many times it could repair itself, and he couldn't imagine himself one-sidedly destroying it. If he suffered any injuries, it would be difficult for him to continue fighting. Rio immediately understood that it would be disadvantageous for him if this battle dragged out.

Aishia. Let's assimilate and fight him together, he called out to Aishia telepathically.

By assimilating with a spirit, Rio's combat power would rise dramatically. Fighting separately had the benefit of allowing them to divide roles, but he believed they were better off improving his individual combat power even if they had to abandon that.

Got it. But keep the degree of assimilation low until you use your power.

Of course, there was a reason Aishia gave a conditional agreement.

Assimilation was, as the word implied, when the spirit and their contractor fused into the same heart and body. In other words, by assimilating with a spirit, a human became a nonhuman existence. The stronger the degree of assimilation was, the further away from being a human they became.

It would be the first time Aishia and Rio assimilated since the battle with Saint Erica. There was no telling what kind of changes would happen to Rio's physical body after a high degree of assimilation. Depending on the situation, it was possible for trouble to occur when everything was over, turning Rio into a nonhuman existence. After all, the first time they assimilated, Rio's hair and eyes changed color.

I'll leave the degree of assimilation to you, Aishia. Just keep in mind that we may have to use our powers before the signal arrives.

Celia had asked them to wait until the next large-scale sorcery activated to use their transcendent powers, but there was a chance they wouldn't be able to wait that long. That was how powerful the golem was. Rio's brow furrowed.

Okay, let's go!

Yup.

Aishia canceled her materialized form and vanished. The nearly broken mask

she had been wearing fell to the ground.

"Huh...?"

That made Liselotte and the others react with shock. But as they were doing that, Rio's and Aishia's assimilation completed. While there was no change in his appearance—

"This is amazing as always..."

A tremendous sense of omnipotence surged within Rio. His body felt lighter than ever before, and his senses were all heightened to their maximum potential.

There were several benefits to assimilating with a spirit. First, he had a far higher affinity for ode and mana, and could control far more powerful arts. Next, even when his physical body was wounded, he could repair himself without dying easily.

Okay, materializing Spirit Arms.

By assimilating with a spirit, he was able to use a unique spirit weapon. A single sword appeared in Rio's hand out of nowhere. It looked exactly like the phenomenon of a hero materializing their Divine Arms.

Of course it did—the Divine Arms that the heroes used were actually the Spirit Arms from assimilating with upper high class spirits. Considering the way he had appeared, it was only natural for those who knew nothing about assimilation to assume he was another hero.

"Wha..."

Everyone watching on was so dumbfounded, they held their breaths in shock.

But whether Rio was a hero or not was irrelevant to the golem. It didn't possess the emotion of surprise. Instead, as soon as it finished repairing its missing head, it charged at Rio. It closed in on him in an instant and immediately swung its sharp claws. Rio held his spirit sword up and blocked the claws. The golem attempted to sweep him away with force, but Rio stood his ground in opposition.

Its strength really is on another level.

Thanks to the assimilation, Rio's physical strength had risen significantly. He had blocked this attack from front-on to check how well he could compete against the golem, but he could feel he was still at a disadvantage.

He could only compare based on his own experience, but it felt like the golem's physical strength was comparable to when Erica was possessed by the upper high class spirit. In order to fully compete against the golem, Aishia would have to raise the degree of their assimilation.

If it's like this, we still have a chance...

Rio had just enough strength to put up a fair fight for now. Besides, it wasn't just his physical abilities that had increased.

"Look out!"

Just then, Sara's voice could be heard. She had just landed sometime after Aishia, and yelled to inform Rio of the feather blades flying at his back.

However, an orb of light floated behind Rio's back. Without a single glance backwards, Rio steered the orb into intercepting the feather blades.

"H-How is he able to knock those down?"

Sara, Orphia, and Alma were all rendered speechless. There were far more than just ten or twenty feather blades, and each one flew at a tremendous speed. Knocking them down without even looking at them was such an amazing feat, they wondered if he had eyes on the back of his head.

Of course, Rio didn't actually possess a third eye. His senses were merely sharpened by the assimilation—almost like a sixth sense. He didn't even need to use spirit arts to search his surroundings since his senses extended outwards.

It was almost like he had become one with nature. The position and shape of anything with magic essence could be clearly seen in his mind.

That was why he could tell the golem's tail was sneaking towards him from below. On top of that, the golem also thrust out its free left arm in an attempt to stab Rio. It would be difficult to deal with all those attacks with a single sword.

Rio temporarily retreated and distanced himself from the golem. The golem wrapped essence around its claws and slashed them at Rio. The sharp slash of light extended from its claws, closing in on Rio from outside of his attack range.

Rio immediately moved upwards and out of the range of the slash. In exchange, the slash struck the rooftop garden and smashed the floor, sending pieces flying through the air. The golem then took to the air after Rio.

If it's going to follow me, then...

Rio flew even higher to get away from the golem. The golem immediately rose to close the distance, so the space between them didn't change. However...

With this, I can lead the golem away from the roof.

He succeeded in drawing the golem away from the rooftop garden as planned. The feather blades the golem was controlling also rose into the air after the main body, shifting the battlefield to the sky.

Rio continued rising to create as much distance from Latifa and the others as possible. The golem spread its wings of light and fired countless spears to shoot him down. Rio flew in a zigzag pattern to avoid them.

The transcendent powers have to be used within the barrier, right?

If they had to fight within the barrier, the capital would be exposed to their battle. In order to minimize the damage to the castle and city, it would've been better to leave the Galarc Kingdom like this. But there must have been a reason he was told to remain within the barrier.

All right, then let's go that way.

There were multiple uninhabited areas included within the wide barrier that covered the capital. Rio glanced around quickly and selected an area where there would be little damage even if they fought intensely. However...

The golem accelerated endlessly, closing in on Rio at a speed faster than the speed of sound. Rio reacted instinctively and evaded the charge, but that allowed the feather blades to surround him.

It seems like I won't be able to move so freely...

With no other choice, Rio prepared to fight back at their current location. Just as he did so, the mask on his face creaked.

◇ ◇ ◇

In the sky above Galarc's royal capital, Sora and the other golem were darting through the sky in a complex route. Their speed had long surpassed what the human eye could follow with the naked eye. Each time they flew within range of each other, their fists would collide, creating shock waves across the sky.

A direct fistfight with a golem would normally be a suicidal act. A human body would be flattened by a single blow—even a grazing blow could end a life. Especially since they were flying about faster than the speed of sound. The wind pressure of the golem flying past was enough to kill.

That's why Rio and Aishia, who had their physical bodies enhanced, slowed their speed the moment before making an attack. They flew at near supersonic speeds, but only made minimal turns out of consideration of the burden on their bodies.

However, as a disciple of the Dragon King, Sora's traits allowed her to fight the golem in close combat while maintaining that supersonic speed. That was, her dragonkin form. Sora was able to materialize her spiritual dragon body around her physical body.

A dragon's body was the strongest body in the world, acting as a suit of armor to protect oneself. Its skin was resistant to all kinds of magic attacks, and at the same time was hard enough to deflect all physical attacks, sharp or blunt.

Furthermore, it dramatically increased the physical strength and speed of the person beneath the armor.

"You've sure got guts directly facing Sora, disciple of the Dragon King!" Sora yelled.

She currently had horns growing from her head, wings growing from her back, and other dragon parts scattered along the rest of her body. Her overall form remained humanoid, but she clearly looked like a dragonkin.

But the armor of the golem directly facing Sora could also be said to be the strongest in the world. It had specs capable of overwhelming most opponents with the strength of its armor alone.

Be it in close combat, ranged combat, or against an army, the golem could deal with anything. The title of the ultimate weapon of the Seven Wise Gods wasn't just for show. The fact they were evenly matched with Sora, a disciple of the Dragon King, was proof of that.

"Take that!"

At the very least, when it came to hand-to-hand combat, Sora had the upper hand. As they flew around at high speeds and exchanged blows, she was able to land her particularly strong hit in one spot. Sora's blow overwhelmed the golem, forcing it back and off-balance.

"Hey hey hey!"

A flurry of punches flew from Sora's fists. The golem's sturdy armor became dented through physical force alone. Despite losing its balance, the golem attempted to punch back, but Sora caught its right arm, left arm, and both wings in turn. Then, golem's tail twisted to stab her.

"Hmph!"

Sora bent the dragon tail she was so proud of and slapped the golem's tail away.

"You're not the only one with a tail!"

She opened her small mouth as wide as it could go. An intense light swirled in front of her mouth and was released as a destructive ray. The breath attack crackled like an electric current as it shot straight forward. It was terribly powerful; just like the strikes that Rio and Aishia had used to blow apart the golems' bodies, the highly compressed energy was almost out of control.

Everything from the golem's chest and up was swallowed by a thick beam of light. Its armor began melting the moment it came into contact, and the light pierced through the golem's body soon after. The upper half of its chest was cleanly erased, leaving only its arms, abdomen, and lower body remaining.

“Heh.” Sora snorted in triumph and retreated, discarding the golem’s separated arms.

However, the repair process had already begun. Particles of light gathered and formed the shape of the lost body parts.

If this guy is the disciple of one of the Wise Gods, the master may be nearby. If they are, it’ll have an endless supply of magic essence. There’ll be no end to this fight. Ugh, how annoying. Sora sighed in her head as she crossed her arms and waited for the golem to repair itself.

“Hey golem, which Wise God is in charge of you? What reason does your master have for causing a commotion here?”

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Instead of making a counterattack, Sora mouthed off at it.

Naturally, the golem didn't reply. It had long since finished repairing itself, but it seemed to have learned that Sora couldn't be easily defeated with close combat. It refrained from charging recklessly.

"You lot are as hard to read as always—do you even have a will of your own? At any rate, you should be able to understand Sora's words. In fact, your master should be able to speak through you. You're listening nearby, aren't you? Come out already!"

Sora had once fought Lina's golem disciple. It had been at Lina's request—since she wanted to collect combat data—so she was pretty familiar with the workings of a golem. Assuming one of the Seven Wise Gods was controlling the golem, Sora attempted to gather information through conversation. However, the golem remained silent, eyes glowing eerily.

"Tch, piece of junk!" Sora huffed.

Is it possible this thing isn't a disciple? It was a lot easier to fight than Sora expected...

There was something that felt off. As far as Sora could remember, the golem disciple of Lina's she fought had much higher combat abilities than this. She could vaguely remember being told that golems could only use their full potential once they became disciples of the Wise Gods.

Maybe the one who activated this guy isn't a Wise God? But then who...?

There was no end to her questions, but there wasn't enough information to make a conclusion. In the end, Sora gave up on thinking.

"Whatever. Maybe your master will appear if Sora keeps beating you up. If you don't want to get sick of being defeated by me..."

Sora sighed in exasperation and swung her arms as though she was warming up.

"You better prepare for the worst!"

She charged at the golem. But at that moment, the golem released light energy that wrapped around its entire body. Sora came to a sudden stop.

"Hah, trying to use an aura to harden yourself?" she said with a smirk. "Well, Sora can do that too."

She released a light that converted essence into energy and wrapped it around her body like the golem.

"Let the beating begin!"

Sora charged towards the golem and resumed the battle.

◇ ◇ ◇

Latifa and the others had been left behind in the rooftop garden of the Galarc Castle. Everyone was watching the battle in the sky with bated breath.

As a transcendent one and his disciple, Rio and Sora easily faded from the mind and memories of other people. But as long as the battle with the golem was ongoing, they were extremely noticeable, and everyone was able to perceive them.

“Hey, is he a hero too?” Hiroaki asked quietly.

“There are six heroes in total,” Roanna answered from beside him with a hesitant look. This was clearly stated in the legends.

Presently, there were a total of six known heroes: Sendo Masato, who became a hero just the other day; Sumeragi Satsuki of the Galarc Kingdom; Sakata Hiroaki of the Restoration; Sendo Takahisa of the Centostella Kingdom; Shigekura Rui of the Beltrum Kingdom; and Kikuchi Renji of the Proxia Empire. And yet...

“So how is he using a Divine Arms? That *is* a Divine Arms, right? Is there a seventh hero or something?” Hiroaki asked, voice turning harsh. He didn’t seem to be angry because of envy or jealousy, but his expression was closer to a panicked frustration.

“That’s...”

Roanna was at a loss for words.

If we’re both heroes, why is he so different from me? What makes him so much stronger?

Bitter memories of when Hiroaki lost to Kikuchi Renji while retreating from Rodania flashed through his mind. That defeat was what sparked his desire to grow stronger. Losing to a fellow hero—a cheeky brat younger than him at that—had been a trigger for him. And now, another man that was possibly a hero had appeared. He was fearlessly facing the monster that Hiroaki would have immediately turned tail and run from.

Damn it. I should be like him...

Indeed, Hiroaki was a hero too. But that thought only made him feel his powerlessness more keenly. He gritted his teeth and clenched his fists.

“Do you know who he is, Professor Celia?” Christina asked.

Everyone had watched Celia call Aishia’s name and speak to her earlier. Their gazes gathered on her once again, wondering if she knew Rio and Sora as well.

“Yes...I do.”

“Who is he?”

Unsure if it was okay to reply, Celia hesitated before giving her affirmation. But when Christina questioned her further...

“That’s Haruto,” she replied clearly, no sign of hesitation left on her face.

“Haruto?”

Due to the effects of the rules of god in this world, only a handful of people could recall the existence of the transcendent ones. Everyone listened on in confusion.

“Haruto Amakawa. That’s the name of the boy you’ve all forgotten,” Celia continued, looking up at Rio as she spoke.

“The boy we’ve forgotten...”

No one tried to deny her statement outright. Everyone looked up at Rio fighting in the sky and swallowed their breaths.

However, there were three people whose eyes widened in shock when they heard the name: Aki, Latifa, and Liselotte.

“The peach-haired girl’s name is Aishia, and the smaller girl that was here earlier is Sora. Everyone here once had a connection to Haruto. That connection is severed right now, but...” Celia began to explain.

“W-Wait! Please wait a moment!” Aki shouted in a fluster.

Masato flinched. “What’s wrong, Aki? Calm down...”

“B-But that...” Aki’s lips trembled. “That’s the name of my blood-related older brother...”

There was no doubt she had forgotten the name Rio, who was born and raised in this world. But she could still remember Haruto’s name, who was born and raised on Earth. He was her biological brother who she was separated from when her parents divorced when she was four years old.

However, Haruto was a sensitive topic for Aki. Regardless of whose fault the divorce was, her earliest memory was of how depressed her mother was. This made her form a misplaced resentment towards her father and Haruto for leaving them, lasting until now.

Those feelings shouldn’t have changed since she came to this world. But for some reason, that sense of hatred was oddly faded right now. Aki touched a hand to her chest as though to confirm those feelings.

A short silence passed.

“Before my mother remarried, my name was Amakawa Aki.”

Aki hesitantly revealed her name from before her parents’ divorce to

everyone while she stared up at Rio in the sky.

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While those in the rooftop garden were gazing up at Rio, the boy in question was in the midst of a fierce midair battle with the golem.

When he flew around and kept his distance, the golem naturally made long-ranged attacks. The feather blades approaching from every direction were annoying to deal with, but the light spears being released from its wings of light were even worse in the current situation where he had to worry about damage to the surroundings.

The light spears that exploded upon impact contained significant force. If the golem spread its light spears around while maintaining its distance, the residential area of the city could be destroyed.

Thus, he had to limit the golem's choice of arms. In order to do that, Rio stayed within close range of the golem and challenged it to a close combat fight.

But even though he was able to push himself a little more thanks to the assimilation, the golem's armor was much stronger than Rio's physical body. It was impossible for him to throw direct punches and tackle the golem at high speed like Sora. Rio had to slow down after every approach and invite the golem into close-quarters combat.

When Rio got close and raised his sword, the golem created claws of light from its fists. The variation in weapons the golem could use at once was another issue when fighting at close range. It had claws on both hands, a tail that could extend and retract freely, and feather blades that could fly independently of one another.

Rio had no choice but to make up for his lack of weapons with his spirit arts. He deployed countless orbs of light around himself to deal with the approaching feather blades. He would handle the claws of light and eerily swaying tail with his sword and body.

But the golem still had the advantage of weapon number. As long as Rio lacked a dragon body like Sora's, it wouldn't be wise for him to get into a head-on slashing match.

Rio continued moving after getting up close to the golem, flying about rapidly to distract it. On top of that, he aimed a swing of his Spirit Arms at the thinner armor on the golem's side.

In the next moment, the golem disappeared. To be more precise, it had

moved at a rapid speed to be behind Rio in an instant. It swung its claws of light to slash apart Rio's body, but Rio accelerated to avoid it and moved around to the golem's side.

The golem responded to Rio's speed by changing its direction to face him. When Rio swung his sword, the claws of light were in place to block him.

Not even the Spirit Arms can cut an area enhanced with magic essence, huh? In that case...

What if there was another spot where the armor was uncovered besides the claws? The thought crossed Rio's mind, but the moment he stopped moving with his weapon pressed against the golem's, a raging wave of attacks would rush at him. Rio swiftly resumed moving.

The golem seemed to understand Rio's goal too, as it was moving around to prevent him from taking aim. As a result, both sides were flying about one another at a dizzying speed to ensure they kept their advantageous position.

Thanks to the assimilation, Rio was in his best condition. His body was light, and his flight abilities had improved tremendously. Part of it was thanks to the leeway created in his capacity for spirit arts, but his sturdier body also increased his ability to make impossible trajectory changes significantly.

Before assimilation, Rio and Aishia were able to meet its speed if they were moving in a straight line, but Aishia had been unable to make finer adjustments at her top speed, which was why she had struggled with her midair battle.

Rio made heavy use of trajectory changes he would have hesitated to make before assimilating in an attempt to tear down the golem's defenses.

It's following me without a problem at this speed.

He was putting up a better fight than a head-on battle of power, but he still wasn't able to outspeed the golem. Since Rio's physical body was inferior in toughness, if he were to make a proper strike while flying, he had to be at a faster speed than the golem.

There'll be no end to things at this rate. Aishia, can you increase the degree of our assimilation? Rio asked Aishia telepathically while he moved.

We're already at sixty percent or so...

The current number was already fairly high. Since the degree of assimilation and its effect on the human body was yet to be fully verified, Aishia couldn't say it would be fine with certainty.

But at this rate, they lacked a decisive blow. Lina had instructed them to use their transcendent powers and defeat the golem on her signal. All they really needed to do was distract the golem until then.

If possible, make it seventy percent. Okay?

Rio wanted to test how far he could fight without using his transcendent powers. He asked Aishia to increase the level of their assimilation.

Fine. Tell me immediately if you notice anything strange about your body.

Got it.

Rio's condition instantly increased significantly. It was a mere ten percent change, but the effect it had was night and day. As soon as Rio felt that difference, he wrapped a large chunk of his magic essence around his sword. The blade glittered silver and began to scatter crackling sparks.

Then, Rio raised his flight speed. The sudden change in speed caused a delay in the golem's reaction.

If it's like this, then...!

Rio moved behind the golem. He was already swinging his sword. The golem reflexively flicked its tail, but the Spirit Arms in Rio's hand severed the tail. Without missing a beat, Rio flipped his blade and accelerated at once, slashing at the golems body.

The next moment, the golem turned around to face Rio, blocking Rio's slash with its claws of light. But the path of Rio's swinging sword was slightly faster. Realizing it couldn't defend itself in time, the golem attempted to retreat backwards, but...

The sword that was swung fast enough to leave sound behind shot towards the wrist of the hand the golem raised in defense. The blade that was sharpened by an enormous amount of essence easily severed the golem's hand.

Immediately after, Rio released the rampaging essence sealed in the sword.

In the pale azure sky that was dimly lit by the beginnings of dawn, a single shooting star fell... Or at least, that's what it would have looked like from the ground.

The slash of light released from Rio's sword became a blinding beam that swallowed the entire upper body of the golem. The golem's upper body was melted in an instant, leaving only its lower body behind once the slash had faded.

However, the lost upper body was already repairing itself. There was no time for Rio to catch his breath.

"Guh...!"

Rio immediately closed in on the golem to prevent its regeneration. He had naturally predicted the golem's regeneration and was already preparing more condensed essence in his sword. With that, he intended on erasing the golem's

lower half as well...

But the golem began retreating while repairing its body.

Damn this thing...

Rio immediately pursued it, but the flying feather blades got in his way. He intercepted them with light bullets, but the decrease in his speed was inevitable. In that time, the golem completed its regeneration. Its essence swelled dramatically, and it came to a sudden stop.

Rio reflexively came to a screeching halt out of wariness.

What's going on?

The magic essence overflowing from the golem's body was dense enough to be seen by the naked eye. That magic essence converted into light energy that wrapped around the golem's body.

Is this a physical body enhancement? No... It's the same as the light that grew from its fingertips. It's using the energy from its attacks to cover its body.

Rio instantly saw through its actions.

There were some magic, enchanted swords, and spirit arts in the world that used light energy as a physical means of attack. It was most commonly called the light or neutral element. The most well-known example of this was the photon bullet magic *Photon Projectilis* and the magic cannon *Magicae Displodo*. The King's Sword, Alfred, also used an enchanted sword that could release light slashes, and the light orbs Rio used had a similar effect. So did Celia's Durandal magic, as well as the blow Rio and Aishia used to erase the golem's armor in battle.

The more magic essence that was poured into it, the more powerful the attack would be. It was even stronger when that essence was condensed.

Furthermore, while Rio generally fought without releasing the light energy wrapped around his sword, he could theoretically release a more powerful blow if he released that energy with his swing. However...

Is that possible?

The sword could be wrapped in energy because it was a physical object. The energy could serve as an essence barrier from external attacks, but the sword within it would be subject to the burden of the energy. If the energy exceeded the endurance limit of the object, there was a risk the object would collapse under the pressure.

But if it's the golem's armor... It has both offensive and defensive force. How troubling.

This meant the golem's essence consumption would also skyrocket, but when

Rio considered how much sturdier the armor would become...

Is seventy percent enough?

His expression darkened. Just then, a change occurred to the barrier covering the capital. A huge sorcery circle large enough to cover the entire city appeared in the air.

“Is this...” Rio looked up. The surface of the barrier was glittering with a blinding light. “Is this the large-scale sorcery Celia mentioned?”

Rio gazed at the sorcery circle curiously, wondering what effect it contained.

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Interlude: Sandbox World

When god departed from this world, supernatural rules that should never have existed were born in the world as an afterthought. They were the rules of god.

The rules could restrict even the transcendent ones.

No, they existed *purely* to restrict the transcendent ones. When broken, a penalty would befall them. However, the transcendent ones—the Seven Wise Gods—had been researching how to evade those rules for a long time now, since long before the Divine War era. Indeed, research began shortly after the god that created this world departed from it.

The masks were one such result. The Wise God Lina had spent a long, long time on her research. Even after breaking up with the other Wise Gods, she continued her research alone. As a result, there was something she could say with relatively high certainty.

Somewhere separate from this world...

The root, the origin, the Akashic Record. Whatever it was called, that separate place was connected to this world, and it probably recorded everything in this world.

Everything in existence. The living organisms, the objects, the various physical, magical, and spiritual laws, the events that happened in the past, the events that failed to happen in the past, the events that could happen in the future, the events that might not happen in the future...all of it.

Father wrote the rules of god there. That is the true power of god. The contents of what Father wrote there are reflected word-for-word in this world.

Indeed, the all-knowing and all-powerful god was able to access that place and write whatever he wanted to change this world. It was probably even possible to bend existing laws and historical events.

His intentions and purpose were unclear, but Lina believed this ability was probably what created life in this world, formed the sorcery and spirit arts, and gave the transcendent ones their powers.

As long as we exist in this world, we cannot avoid the rules Father wrote down.

On the off chance something that contradicted the writings happened, huge corrective forces would work at a global scale. That was already proven by the rules of god. In order to conform to what the god wrote, certain events were forcefully twisted, and penalties were forcefully paid.

I don't know how far Father's power can reach. Transcendent powers, sorcery, and spirit arts can be used in the outside world as long as they're learned in advance. But at the very least, we know the rules of god don't apply to those outside this world. So what if we created an independent domain that was separate from the rest of this world, right here in this world?

It would be a singularity that existed in this world, but was regarded as existing outside of the world. Lina had been making the calculations to create such a domain in this mana crystal for the past one thousand years.

If my theory is right, the rules of god won't apply within this domain. The problem is the vast amount of time needed to calculate the creation of the domain. That, and the fact we don't know how the world's corrective forces will act upon a space where the rules of god don't apply.

At worst, an unknown penalty could befall Lina as well. Since she couldn't use her own transcendent powers to see what would happen after the domain was created, she still had some worries, but—

It's too late to back down now. There's still things I need Celia to do. I feel sorry for this girl, but...

Lina thought of Celia, who she just sent to the surface not long ago, and placed a hand against Miharu's chest.

Just then, the light of the mana crystal floating before her dimmed.

Looks like the calculation is done.

In other words, preparations to create the domain were ready.

"Are you watching after all, Father? It can't be a coincidence that the calculations that have been ongoing for a thousand years ended at this moment."

She couldn't help but question whether it was the invisible helping hand of god. Lina looked up at the ceiling of the empty room.

But the room was silent. No answer came after all.

Don't make me laugh. Fine, I'll just do it my way.

Lina chuckled in self-mockery. Then, with a determined look, held her hands up at the mana crystal floating in the middle of the room.

"*Pandora*."

Lina uttered the spell to create a domain.

Chapter 5: Our Hero

In what should have been the still-dim Galarc Kingdom capital, the sky suddenly brightened as though morning had arrived.

“What’s that...?”

In the castle’s rooftop garden, Latifa and the others gazed up in wonder at the glittering barrier and sorcery circle floating in the air.

There’s no mistaking it. This is the signal.

Celia was the only one who understood the situation and gasped. The others were unable to understand the sight before them and froze as though time had stopped. The sorcery circle in the sky above the capital and the boundary surface of the barrier was undoubtedly reflected in their eyes, but their gaze was unfocused.

It was as though they were staring into pitch black darkness. Latifa and the others stood dazed as they gazed blankly upwards.

Eventually, they found a light.

Everyone’s eyes caught sight of Rio fighting high in the sky.

Tears welled in their eyes, as though they had forgotten something very important all this time.

There were indeed some hazy moments in the midst of their peaceful lives with one another. Like someone whose name and face they didn’t know should have been living by their side.

Yet they hadn’t paid it any mind. They dismissed it as their imagination, returning to their days without that someone whose name and face they didn’t know.

But that hadn’t been a mistake.

It hadn’t been their imagination.

They recalled everything.

The missing pieces of the puzzle fit into place all at once.

Time unfroze for them and began moving forward again.

“Onii-chan...” Latifa cried, voice trembling.

That’s right, that’s Onii-chan! My big brother...!

How could she have forgotten someone so dear to her until now? Someone

she never should have forgotten...

She was so happy, yet so sad, and so sorry. Latifa’s emotions were a jumbled mess.

“Ugh... Wah...”

She couldn’t hold back the tears welling in her eyes, but she rubbed them hard enough to chafe the skin, wiping her tears away. She wanted to have Rio in her sights as soon as possible, for as long as possible...because she had forgotten Rio all this time.

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She didn’t want her tears to obscure Rio; there was no time to cry.

What if she forgot him again? Such fears crossed her mind.

I’ll never forget him again! Ever!

She wouldn’t stand for it. Relishing the joy of remembering her most beloved person, her adopted brother that she adored, Latifa forced her tears back through sheer will and stared straight up at Rio fighting in the sky.

Meanwhile, everyone else was reacting in their own way. Some were bewildered by how they could have forgotten someone they never would have forgotten, and others were confused.

“Everyone...you’ve remembered!” Celia was overcome with emotion as she watched over everyone.

“Did you remember all along, Professor?” Christina asked, blinking at Celia.

“Yes. I forgot at first too, but one day, the memories suddenly...” Celia revealed.

“W-Wait a moment! How could we have forgotten Haruto and Lady Aishia up until now?” Sara interjected in confusion, unable to understand the situation.

“Right, it was almost like everyone’s memories and awareness had been rewritten so that Haruto never existed in the first place...”

“And that’s impossible...”

It was almost like every trace of an existing person had been thoroughly erased from the world. If that had happened on a global scale, it couldn’t possibly be a human feat. Orphia and Alma both gulped nervously.

“Saint Erica... That battle with her was the trigger, wasn’t it? After that battle, we forgot about Haruto and Lady Aishia,” Liselotte said, organizing the events that had happened back then. “But why?”

The discussion naturally arrived there. Many of those present had the same question on their minds.

“I know!” Latifa stated firmly.

“Huh?”

Everyone’s attention gathered on her.

“Onii-chan and Aishia protected us. I don’t know why that led to us forgetting them... But I’m sure it was to protect us. That’s why things have turned out like this!” Latifa declared with absolute certainty.

“So you don’t know why we forgot after all...”

Everyone was confused because of that reason, yet Latifa completely skipped over that to come to her own understanding. Sara looked dumbfounded.

“Heheh.”

Christina and Liselotte found themselves chuckling in spite of themselves.

"Wh-What's the matter, sister?" Flora asked in confusion.

Christina shook her head slowly. "Nothing. I just agree with Suzune's point."

That's right. When we escaped from Rodania, he saved us...

She recalled how Duke Arbor's forces invaded Rodania just the other day. Without Rio's help protecting them on the way to the airships bound for Galarc or after the airships took off from Rodania, they wouldn't have escaped. She originally believed their escape was due to a series of miracles, but that hadn't been the case.

Sara also had an exasperated smile. "Goodness, when it comes to you and Haruto..."

"Either way, this I'm sure of: even after we forgot him, Onii-chan remembered us and protected us. And he's still protecting us even now."

Latifa made an accurate conjecture of the situation while they had lost their memories. She placed a hand against her chest and gazed up at the sky where Rio was.

"Yes, that's right. In the battle with Saint Erica, Haruto and Aishia used an extremely dangerous power in order to protect us. The price for that power was for their existence to be forgotten—but they paid it in an attempt to protect us. And they succeeded. That's why we're standing here today," Celia revealed, confirming Latifa's theory.

"That's... That's so..."

Flora covered her mouth in sorrow. And she wasn't the only one—the others also had pained expressions on their faces. After all, wasn't the price of erasing yourself to protect everyone just too much? How lonely must Rio and Aishia have felt?

"But this isn't the time to be grieving! We've remembered Onii-chan now. We have to tell him 'welcome back' with a smile!"

They would make Rio and the others happy. They wouldn't let them feel lonely anymore. Latifa's tone was resolute.

"You're right. I'm sure he'll be delighted to hear you've all remembered him. Let's surprise him together once the battle's over."

Celia patted Latifa's head gently in agreement. Thus, the group continued watching over the battle between Rio and the golem.

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Shortly after Lina activated the new large-scale sorcery in the capital...

Rio curiously stared up at the sorcery circle floating in the sky. The golem was similarly distracted by what was going on and looked up warily.

What kind of sorcery is this?

Rio had never seen it before. In fact, the spell formula was so complex, he couldn't tell what kind of sorcery it was.

Aishia, this is the sorcery Celia mentioned, right?

Probably.

According to her message, as soon as they received the signal, they were to use their transcendent powers to defeat the golem.

In that case, all that's left is to use our powers and defeat them...

Rio wondered for a brief moment if he should continue to fight without using his powers. But the light energy flowing from the golem's entire body probably meant it had greater combat abilities than before.

Rio could probably increase his own abilities if he raised his degree of assimilation, but since he didn't know how much he could fight in his assimilated state, he decided that it would be better to avoid a drawn-out battle against the constantly regenerating golem. If he fought in his assimilated state without using his transcendent powers, it was possible he would reach his limit first.

There's no other choice. But we can only use it twice.

Aishia also agreed to using the transcendent powers. Even after taking into account the burden it could place on Rio, she decided that taking it down quickly was the least risky option to take.

Got it. What about Sora?

Rio looked up at Sora, who was floating in the distance. Sora was similarly intrigued by the sorcery circle overhead and had paused in her battle to observe it. The same went for the golem she was facing. In his current state, Rio could move right next to Sora in a matter of seconds, but...

In that case, we can use this chance...

Transcendent ones had the power to summon their disciples. By thinking silently, Rio could immediately bring Sora to his side.

"Dragon King!" Sora cried as soon as she appeared.

"Sora, I'm going to use my transcendent powers to defeat the golems," Rio said, getting straight to the point.

"Sora believes that's best too. These things will keep regenerating as long as they have magic essence, so defeating them normally won't do anything."

“I see. So that’s why she said to erase their internal essence using my powers...”

“There’s no one who can’t be defeated by the Dragon King’s powers!” Sora boasted smugly, puffing out her chest.

“But I was told to only use my powers up to two times. Since I can’t risk missing, can you help me out?”

If he missed with his powers both times, the golems would be left to run free without any means of being defeated. That’s why he couldn’t afford to miss—if he were to use his powers, he had to be sure he would hit them.

Sora nodded, tapping her chest proudly. “Of course! Order away!”

“I want to ensure the transcendent power hits. Can you use an attack that can stop the golems from moving? I’ll finish them off during that time.”

Rio had only ever used his transcendent powers once before. In all likelihood, he had to pause briefly before using his transcendent power. Against an opponent that could move as fast as the golems, it would be preferable to have a clear opening such as by sealing their movements.

“Easy peasy. Just leave it to Sora! There’s no way an invincible duo like us would lose to those junk piles!” Sora said confidently.

I’m here too, Aishia immediately called out through telepathy.

“Ahahaha, that’s right. Aishia says it’s a trio.” Rio laughed as he passed on her words.

“Hmph. That Aishia...” Sora’s cheeks puffed up like a small balloon.

“In that case, it’d be better to fight three on two from here. We won’t be able to know if it’d be better to take them one by one or both at once until we try...”

“Got it. Sora will lure the other big guy over here first.”

Sora swung her right arm in circles while glaring at the golem in the distance. It had already begun flying towards them in order to reach Sora after she teleported. Its body was releasing light energy just like before.

“Ha! Looks like Sora didn’t even need to lift a finger!”

Sora also released an energy from her entire body like the golem and began her counterattack. She charged towards the approaching golem, swinging her fist to meet the golem’s fist with a tremendous impact. The shock waves traveled all the way to Rio.

Sora really is amazing...

He felt like he could rely on her strength.

We can’t lose to her either. Aishia, raise the degree of assimilation—

Yup, I’ve already raised it.

Rio and Aishia increased their assimilation level with determination.

"Hmm?" Just then, Rio glanced over at those in the rooftop garden. Under the current situation, he was yet to realize Latifa and the others had regained their memories. However, he noticed their oddly heated gazes and expressions as they gazed up at him. He found that rather strange, but they were currently in the middle of a battle. He couldn't afford to be distracted by them and promptly turned his gaze back to the golem.

It's coming!

The other golem was making an attack at Rio. It seemed to have converted the energy flowing from its body into propulsive power. On top of its increased offensive and defensive power, its speed had also increased dramatically. However, with their increased assimilation, Rio was also able to increase his speed further. He reacted perfectly to the golem's charge and avoided colliding with it.

As soon as the golem passed him, it forced itself to turn around and make another attack. Rio also used his spirit arts to wrap his sword in powerful light energy and timed his slash for the same moment. But the golem caught his slash with the energy emitted from its claws.

The next moment, the essence in Rio's sword increased, condensed, and strengthened in force. At the same time, the golem's claws also increased in essence density and force in order to face Rio.

Rio immediately retreated, distancing himself from the golem. Energy scattered from the sword in his hand like fireworks. He rapidly accelerated towards the golem like a drawn bow, swinging his sword horizontally at the golem's chest, but the golem leaned backwards and avoided Rio's slash by a hair's breadth. It then proceeded to twist its body and swipe its arm at him; Rio also rose upwards to evade the range of its attack. He manipulated his posture midair and turned upside down, this time descending towards the golem at a rapid speed. But the golem started flying away from him. Rio immediately chased after it.

I think I can use the transcendent powers while fighting, but...

As Rio expected, it would be difficult to aim his powers while in a one-on-one fight. He was hoping for a chance to use it while fighting it, but there was no opening to ensure his power would hit the mark.

I'll probably only be able to maintain the activated power for a brief moment.

Just like how humans knew instinctively how to move their bodies and breathe, Rio instinctively knew how to use his power of elimination inherited

from the Dragon King. In short, his transcendent power of elimination manifested as light. For example, he could cut his target with his Spirit Arms if he wrapped the sword with the light of his power, or he could make the light take the shape of another weapon and fire it across a wide area.

However, he hadn't verified the details and specifics of his transcendent powers yet. After all, it was a dangerous power with the risk of death even in an assimilated state. He couldn't just test its use recklessly.

It seems to be wary of my strikes, and it could flee outside the range of my power with its speed. We're definitely going to need Sora's help. While this guy's running around...

With that decided, Rio looked over at Sora, who was fighting the other golem nearby.

"Hey, you! Stop running from our fistfight!"

The other golem seemed to have realized it was at a disadvantage in straight close combat and attempted to distance itself.

All right!

Rio accelerated and moved behind the golem facing Sora. He swung his energy-clad sword and tried to bisect the golem. But the golem immediately noticed his approach and moved to evade him.

He can avoid it even at this timing, huh? But...!

Barely escaping from the sword's range like that was nothing short of impressive. But Rio's goal had been to create a temporary two-on-one situation, and that goal had been successfully achieved.

"Dragon King!" Sora charged in the direction the golem evaded towards, and with that, the golem's reaction was finally delayed. Realizing it was impossible to evade in time, the golem focused the energy emitting from its body around its arms. It folded its arms in front of its body to defend itself against Sora's blow.

"Haaah!"

Sora took the energy wrapped around her body and gathered it around her dragonkin fist, slamming her punch into the golem's crossed arms with all her might.

Immediately after, a booming roar and shock wave shook the area like a meteor had fallen. Forced back by Sora's incredible strength, the sturdy golem's body buckled.

The waves of energy the golem had gathered served as a barrier, but it was unable to block the force completely. The arms it used to defend itself were pulverized, rubble flying through the air and vanishing.

The golem immediately began to repair its missing arms while distancing itself from the threats of Rio and Sora. Feather blades flew around the air.

“Sora won’t let you!” She flew ahead of them, predicting the golem’s intentions. Rio stayed in place and sent light orbs after the feather blades, making it easier for her to move.

Just then, the other golem that had been left ignored made a move. While Rio was busy controlling countless orbs of light, it approached him from his blind spot.

It’s here.

But Rio turned to face the golem as though he had been expecting it. He readied his sword in his hands, and the energy wrapped around it instantly swelled. The golem was only a few dozen meters away from Rio, so it was completely out of range, but...

Rio aimed his sword at the golem and swung it. The torrent of light overflowing from the blade turned into a slashing attack and scattered across a large area. Realizing that a direct hit would deal considerable damage, the golem immediately altered its path dramatically to avoid the strike.

Good.

Having gained a brief moment of time, Rio turned his attention back on Sora. Sora had brought her battle into close combat and was overwhelming the golem that had lost both arms. Fireworks sparked from her fists, condensed energy on the verge of bursting out of control as she whittled away the golem’s armor.

The golem’s repair was unable to keep up with her attacks, slowing its movements greatly. The problem was how it would resume regenerating the moment it was left alone.

“Sora, let’s start with that one!”

They couldn’t afford to let this chance pass.

“Okay! Sora will keep its movements sealed!” Sora replied as she swung her fists, signaling her readiness.

Aishia!

Yup.

With that, Rio focused his mind on activating the transcendent powers. The surface of his sword was charged with light. His sword had been wrapped in light energy in the battle until now, but this light was clearly a different kind of glow. It was as though the light was part of a different world, giving the sword a pure white silhouette.

“Guh...”

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The sword wrapped with transcendent power was mysteriously comfortable in his hand, but it weighed a considerable amount. Although it was activated, a target was yet to be designated, so it was essentially in an energy efficient state. It would be difficult to maintain this state for a long time.

He probably had less than twenty seconds at most. If he didn't use the power properly in that time, the first shot would be wasted with the same amount of burden applied.

As I thought, I'm completely defenseless the moment the power is activated.

It would be a little challenging to activate the power while moving. Feeling relieved that he asked Sora for help, Rio took a deep breath to regulate his condition.

Is it not going to attack?

Then, he glanced at the other golem that was being ignored by them. He was clearly unguarded right now, so it wouldn't have been odd for it to attack. In fact, the golem had actually attempted to do just that, but suddenly stopped for some reason.

It seemed like it had realized Rio was activating his powers and stopped out of caution. Whether it knew that it was the Dragon King's power or not aside, it seemed to be aware it was facing its natural enemy.

Whatever, this is our chance.

At any rate, they had no time. With his transcendent powers already activated, he couldn't afford to think about other things. He was told not to use his powers more than twice. Since he couldn't waste a single shot, the only thing he thought about was making sure his shot hit his mark.

"Sora, I'm going to stab this sword through its body!" Rio shouted, readying his sword.

"Okay!"

At this point in time, he could sense he had a little over ten seconds left to use his power. The golem facing Sora was still yet to repair its arms, and its body was utterly tattered. Despite that, it seemed to sense the danger in Rio's sword and attempted to flee.

"Sora won't let you!"

Sora immediately grabbed the golem's tail and legs, yanking them towards her. The golem was unable to move from her restraint and froze midair.

The next moment, Rio accelerated towards the golem Sora had suppressed.

"Hah!"

The sword in Rio's hand slid into where the heart would be located on a

human body without any resistance at all. The light vanished from the golem's eyes.

The transcendent power of elimination only applied to the target in Rio's mind. He had activated his power while wishing to erase all the magic essence stored within the golem. The sword in Rio's hand glowed brighter, until the light in the sword spread towards the golem, painting it white. The golem's silhouette turned white and stopped moving like time had stopped.

After that, the sword in Rio's hand lost its glow, and the light surrounding the golem suddenly went out too. The golem had vanished without a trace—leaving only its core behind, which promptly began falling to the ground.

"Ah! *Conditum*!" Rio quickly used the Time-Space Cache to store the golem core.

"Wonderful!" Sora cheered.

"Thank you. That leaves just one more..."

They couldn't relax yet. Just as Rio was about to turn to the remaining golem, he felt a weight that threw him off-balance.

"Dragon King?!" Sora cried, rushing to Rio's side.

"I'm fine. I just felt a little dizzy for a moment. What's more important right now is the remaining golem."

Rio smiled to brush off the pain, correcting his posture and turning to the remaining golem. The situation was now completely two-on-one, with Rio and Sora having the advantage. However, they couldn't lower their guards yet. There was only one safe use of the transcendent power left. The fact they couldn't afford to miss a single hit of the power still hadn't changed.

On top of that, the golem also seemed to understand its unfavorable position. It should be aware that the elimination power Rio had just used contained its natural enemy. That's why the golem refrained from charging recklessly and maintained its distance silently instead.

"Please rest here, Dragon King. Sora will capture the remaining one for you," Sora said as she stepped in front of Rio and faced the golem.

In response, the golem spread its wings and sent all its feather blades shooting at Rio and Sora at once.

"Ha, that move won't save you now! You're helpless against the Dragon King and Sora!" Sora shouted, opening her mouth to make a breath attack, but the look on Rio's and Sora's faces fell. With its wings of light still spread, the golem turned to face those below them at the Galarc Castle.

The golem released a large number of spears from its wings of light, aimed

clearly at those in the rooftop garden. Each spear of light was around a meter wide in diameter and contained enough force to create a strong explosion upon impact.

The golem they were currently facing was the second golem Reiss had sent. Its goal was to take the lives of those in the rooftop garden of the castle and eliminate anyone who got in the way. It had probably decided that fighting with Rio and Sora would only result in its defeat, so it was aiming for the weak first to increase the probability of achieving its goal.

It was a rough method to take, but an accurate assessment of the situation.

The next moment, Rio began his sudden descent.

“Dragon King! Ngh!”

Sora hesitated, unsure if she should let Rio go alone when he was suffering from the recoil of using his powers. But she realized it would be bad to leave the golem’s main body alone and approached it to suppress it.

“Oh! You... Wait!”

However, the golem also began a rapid descent after Rio, leaving Sora no choice but to charge after it.

Rio accelerated with all his might to stop the golem’s attack. His falling speed instantly reached the speed of sound, but the spears of light were even faster.

Ngh...

The place they had been fighting the golems was nearly two kilometers aboveground. Even if they descended at the speed of sound from their initial velocity, it would take five seconds. Rio knew he wouldn’t make it at his current speed.

Of course, if Celia and Sara’s group worked together to put up barriers, they should be able to withstand ten to twenty of the spears. But the number of light spears the golem released in that brief amount of time was close to a hundred. Over half of them were raining down in the area where Celia and the others were gathered, and the rest were aimed at their surroundings to prevent their escape.

In which case, even if they could defend themselves against the spears, the castle around them would be destroyed anyway. Without a foundation to stand on, they could fall and die, and those within the castle would be crushed to death too.

With only two seconds until impact, it felt like time was slowing down around them.

It’s no good. I won’t make it in time...!

The sight of someone dear to him dying flashed through Rio's mind. There was nothing he could do if he couldn't make it in time, he could only pray that they would be lucky enough to avoid any deaths, there was no choice but to give up—whether he liked it or not, that was the situation.

But was there really no choice but to give up?

Could he really do nothing but watch?

No!

Rio didn't want to give up. He didn't want to just watch... Which was why Rio surpassed his limits.

"Ggh!"

The maximum degree of assimilation should have been at one hundred percent, but Rio rose beyond that wall of his own will.

No, Haruto!

He could hear Aishia's panicked voice.

I will protect them no matter what...!

Rio's body reached a higher level of existence that wasn't human. Freed from the heavy restraint of a human body, his body swayed like it was radiating energy. Then, his speed quickened explosively.

Strangely enough, he couldn't feel any air resistance. Thus, Rio shot towards the rooftop garden like a lightning bolt, faster than the golem's spears of light.

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Meanwhile, as the people on the rooftop garden watched the golem's spears of light rain down on them...

"What is that...?" Latifa asked with a puzzled look.

"Look out! Everyone, put up a barrier!" Orphia screamed in a panic. At that point, the spears of light had approached close enough to be clearly seen.

"*Octo Magus: Magicae Murum*!"

Oh no! I can't put up any more in one go than this!

Celia cast a magic essence barrier around everyone to protect them, but she was unsure if they could hold up against so many spears.

"What?!"

Suddenly, Rio had landed on top of Celia's barrier, his entire body glowing with light. He arrived like he had teleported to them, making everyone's eyes widen in surprise.

I can't use my transcendent power, so...

Rio looked up at the spears of light raining down from above and created the same number of spears of light hovering around himself. They each had the same might as the golem's spears.

They all shot upwards at once, immediately colliding with the golem's spears of light. Blinding light illuminated the area as explosions occurred one after another. Matching every single one of the hundred or so spears raining overhead, capturing their locations, and shooting them all down was a feat beyond human bounds. Even a human with their physical body enhanced wouldn't be able to process the task with their brain. But in Rio's current state, it was possible.

"What...?!"

Everyone gazed up at the fantastical sparkling explosions with dumbfounded looks and bated breaths. But the sight of the golem rapidly descending soon came into view, followed by Sora behind it.

Rio silently held his left hand up at the golem. He manifested an extra four spears of light and leaped towards the golem; the four spears of light pierced through each of the golem's limbs. The impact slowed the golem's speed dramatically, allowing Sora to catch up.

"Haaah!" she yelled, slamming her fist into the golem's back.

Immediately after, the golem's energy-covered body with enhanced defense crumpled, separating into upper and lower sections. Sora then grabbed the golem's head, but the head turned into particles of light and vanished like a spirit turning into its spirit form.

"Huh?!"

Meanwhile, the bottom half of its body flew away energetically, fleeing from Rio and Sora. It was probably trying to regroup itself—its lower body was already beginning to regenerate.

"Tch." Sora immediately tried to fly after the lower body, but Rio called for her to halt.

"It's okay, Sora! Thank you, I'll take it from here!"

"Okay!" Sora replied in a lively voice.

In that time, the golem had retreated several hundred meters away from Rio. It had even finished repairing its destroyed armor and torso.

"Did you think I'd let you get away?"

Rio caught up with the golem in an instant. He grabbed the repaired torso of the golem with his left hand and held his sword in his right, then activated his transcendent power

The golem immediately swung his tail and stabbed Rio's heart, but his

expression didn’t change. Physical attacks didn’t seem to affect him at all, and there was no blood where the tail pierced through him.

“It’s over.”

Rio took his sword with the activated power and stabbed it into the golem’s repaired body. With that, the regeneration that had completed up to the golem’s head completely stopped. The white light of Rio’s sword seeped into the golem’s body.

Once the power was used, the golem’s body completely vanished. There was a hole left in Rio’s chest from the tail, but it cleanly and instantly regenerated. The core of the golem left behind began to fall.

“*Conditum*.” He stored the golem core in the Time-Space Cache, then returned to the rooftop garden in an instant. He moved like a bolt of lightning, surprising those on the ground. They stared at him with wide eyes.

“Hm...?” Rio reduced the degree of his assimilation and the Spirit Arms in his hand vanished. His body suddenly felt heavier, making him stagger where he stood.

“Let’s go, Sora.” There was no place for a transcendent one like him here. With that thought, Rio forced himself to stand firm. He looked around at everyone and started to leave reluctantly.

“W-Wait!” Latifa yelled. Rio turned to her, and she ran up to him and hugged him with all her might. “Onii-chan!”

“Huh?” Rio looked at her blankly.

“Onii-chan! Onii-chan! Onii-chan...!” Tears welled in her eyes as she hugged Rio with all her might as though to say she wouldn’t let him leave or forget him ever again.

“Why...?”

Did she remember him? Beneath his mask, Rio swallowed his breath.

What about the rules of god?

That was the question that immediately popped into his head.

Oh, I see. So that’s why she said to wait until the sorcery activated before using my transcendent power...

Inside this barrier, the rules of god were invalid. That was the theory Rio immediately came up with.

“I see... You remembered,” he said with a soft smile, happily hugging Latifa back.

“I remembered! I remembered you, Onii-chan! I’m sorry! I’m sorry, Onii-chan!” Latifa sobbed, unable to contain her emotions.

“Why are you apologizing, La— Suzune?” It had been so long, Rio almost called her Latifa as he smiled. But he didn’t know why she was apologizing, so his expression was one of confusion.

“Because I forgot you, Onii-chan! Even though you’re my big brother...!” Latifa wailed loudly as she explained why she was apologizing. She clung to Rio even harder and buried her face in his chest.

“Is that why...? It’s fine. Don’t worry about it,” Rio said gently, reassuring her.

“It’s not fine!” Latifa argued immediately.

“Even then, there was nothing that could be done. Besides...” Rio cupped Latifa’s face in his hands and stared at her at close range.

Latifa flinched and turned red. “Wh-What? Besides what...?”

“You remembered me in the end, right? That makes me very happy. Thank you.” Rio grinned at Latifa, which calmed her down completely.

“Y-Yeah.” Her cheeks turned as red as a ripe peach.

It was the touching reunion of two siblings. Everyone else wanted to run up to Rio as well, but they read the mood and watched over them instead. Sora also puffed up her cheeks in envy, but she read the mood as well and watched on.

“Sorry for worrying you all,” Rio said to everyone.

“Haruto...” Everyone slowly approached him with beaming faces.

“Onii-chan, why are you wearing a mask? Show me your face,” Latifa said, looking up at Rio’s face from his chest.

“Huh? Oh, right...”

Rio remembered he was wearing a mask and reached up to take it off, revealing his face hidden beneath.

“Wha...”

Latifa and the others looked overcome with emotion. Their gazes made Rio chuckle in embarrassment.

“Ahaha...”

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“Are you crying, Onii-chan?” Latifa asked, peering up at Rio’s face from close range. A single tear had indeed rolled down his cheek beneath his mask.

“Am I?” Rio asked, playing dumb as he dabbed his wet cheek with his sleeve.

“You are! You’re definitely crying!” Latifa declared happily. That tear was proof of Rio’s joy at reuniting with everyone. That’s what Latifa seemed to believe.

“Those must be tears of joy from seeing everyone again... I’m really happy right now,” Rio admitted honestly. However, he still seemed to be feeling shy, as he couldn’t look at everyone directly.

I used my powers twice, and it’s still not broken?

He looked down at the mask he removed and furrowed his brow in confusion.

Now that he thought about it, after the second large-scale sorcery was activated, the burden on his mask fell completely silent. Rio concluded that the barrier currently surrounding the capital had the ability to nullify the rules of god.

He looked up at the sky to see the giant sorcery circle had disappeared at some point. Despite that, its effect still seemed to be in place—everyone’s memories of Rio served as proof of that.

“Whoa?!”

Suddenly, Latifa silently headbutted Rio in the chest. It was a wordless objection to him looking elsewhere and not paying attention to her.

“Ahaha. Sorry,” Rio apologized with an awkward laugh, patting Latifa’s head. But the next moment, a haze fell over his vision.

“Wh...” Rio staggered. Not wanting to fall forward on Latifa, he tried to fall backwards.

“Onii-chan?!”

“Haruto?!”

Latifa quickly hugged Rio’s body, while everyone else rushed closer to him.

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Around the same time, in the sky far above where Rio fought the golem...

The Dragon King’s power is as dreadful as always, I see. It seems a little weaker than before, but more than what two golems can deal with...

Reiss had been watching the entire thing unfold from the start.

That aside, this barrier’s effect...

Reiss observed the barrier that enveloped the capital.

"Haven't seen you in a thousand years, Fenris," a girl's voice called out.

Reiss turned in the direction of the voice. "So it was you after all."

A woman was floating in the air. It was Lina. For some reason, her current appearance was completely different from Miharu. No, perhaps this was the original appearance of the Wise God Lina all along. She looked to be around twenty years old, and her doll-like face was beautiful like that of a goddess.

"It's nice to see we're both in good health, huh?" Lina greeted with a light shrug.

"So it seems. I thought you were dead all this time, so I didn't expect you to show yourself like this. What business do you have here?"

"There was no way of hiding it any longer, so I came to give you a warning. It also serves as a nonaggression pact—don't lay your hands on this place anymore."

"Hmm." Reiss hummed without any change in expression.

"In exchange, we won't touch the labyrinth. Of course, I'll let the boy down there know of this too," Lina said, one-sidedly notifying Reiss of the pact.

"What's so important about this place that would make you deploy such an outrageous barrier sorcery to protect it?" Reiss asked, eyeing the capital below.

"Oh? If you're going to ask that, then I want to know what you wanted to accomplish here by using two of the tiger child's golems," Lina replied, completely unaffected.

"Hmm. Did you think those two golems were the only golems we have?"

"Either way, you weren't able to use them to their full potential. And I still have more tricks up my sleeve too."

While the two were bantering with each other with lighthearted words, their eyes weren't laughing at all.

Reiss sighed internally and narrowed his eyes.

Goodness. Just how much is she aware of our forces?

"In fact, why don't we fight it out right here? Our side has the invincible Dragon King and myself. Meanwhile, you're considerably weakened in your current state."

"You say that, but the Dragon King also seemed to be considerably weaker than one thousand years ago. And you should be too, no?"

"Oh? Have you really gone that blind?"

"Who knows?"

Reiss looked back down at the Galarc Castle beneath them.

The strength he showed at the end of that battle was indeed like that of a transcendent one, but...

He ascertained Rio's current strength. On the ground below, Rio was just suffering from the recoil of assimilation and using the transcendent power.

The problem is how this woman has found a means of completely ignoring the rules of god. Although it appears to be restricted to the area within this barrier...

She hadn't been missing for a thousand years for nothing, it seemed.

"Besides, we're both done with preparations, no?" Lina said as though she could read Reiss's mind.

"So you've seen through our plans after all."

The look in Reiss's eyes turned dark. He was ready to fight at any moment.

"Yes, a thousand years ago."

Without breaking her aloof attitude, Lina grinned at Reiss to provoke him.

"I won't fall for your provocations. We are all variables against you—you cannot predict our future accurately." Reiss sighed and calmed down.

Lina tilted her head. "Are you sure about that?" she asked boldly.

"Well, whatever. If all you wanted to do was give that warning, I'll be going now."

"Oh, are you done analyzing this barrier already? There are more questions you want answered, no?"

"I should be the one saying that. Didn't you come all the way here to give your 'warning' to find answers yourself? I'm not about to give you any information."

Reiss sighed tiredly, sounding like he would like nothing more than to leave right away.

"You haven't responded to my offer."

"The one to stay out of this land in exchange for you staying out of the labyrinth? Very well. I'll agree to that for now."

"I see. Then it's a deal."

"I shall excuse myself now. *Transilio*."

Reiss took a teleport crystal from his pocket and uttered the spell. He disappeared, leaving Lina behind.

"I hope I managed to fool him..."

Lina looked down at the Galarc Castle while removing the earring on her left ear. Her body glowed, and her appearance returned to that of Miharu's.

"*Conditum*."

Miharu didn’t possess a Time-Space Cache, yet Lina was able to manipulate space to store the earring.

“*Transilio.*”

She then used teleportation magic and vanished from the spot.

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Back in the rooftop garden of the Galarc Castle...

“Are you okay, Onii-chan?” Latifa asked worriedly, clinging to Rio who had nearly fallen backwards just now.

“I’m fine, just a little tired,” Rio said, attempting to stand on his own. But he couldn’t muster any strength in his body. When he tried to support himself with his own feet, his body swayed beyond his control. The burden on his body felt worse than the first time he assimilated—was it because he used his power twice?

“Haruto,” Aishia said, materializing behind Rio to support him.

“Aishia!” Latifa called with a beaming smile.

“Lady Aishia!”

“Aishia!”

The familiar residents of the mansion surrounded Rio and Aishia.

“Long time no see, everyone,” Aishia said, looking around with a gentle smile. She seemed to be unusually happy for once.

“Hehe.” Celia joined the circle, watching the reunion happily.

“Hmph, taking the best part as always...” Hiroaki snorted, watching everything unfold from a distance. However, he seemed to appreciate the situation, as he didn’t appear to be all that displeased.

“Are you sure you don’t want to join them, Lord Hiroaki?” Gouki asked heartily, watching everyone from the same distance.

“Hah? I’m not the type to do that. I’m not even that close to him to begin with. Shouldn’t you be the one over there? He’s your master, no?”

“It’s because I’m his retainer that I will go last. Besides, Sir Haruto is beloved by everyone. A shabby old man like me has no business cutting in line. The young ones can have the spotlight,” Gouki said with a laugh.

Nearby, King Francois nodded in agreement.

Hiroaki shot a disgusted look at Rio, who was being tugged in all directions by attractive girls. “Young ones? You mean the women. Tch.”

“How’s Satsuki doing? Is she okay?” Rio asked, seeing Satsuki still lying on

the floor.

"Yes. Her life is in no danger, just like you said. Her wounds have healed and her breathing has stabilized," Charlotte replied.

Rio sighed in relief. "That's great. Thank you, Princess Charlotte."

"I should be the one thanking you. Please worry about yourself first."

Charlotte blushed somewhat shyly before showing concern for Rio's condition.

"Ahaha. I'm fine, really." Rio chuckled awkwardly.

Aishia hugged Rio from behind. "You really shouldn't push yourself."

"A-Aishia!" Sora yelled.

She had been watching on with a slightly uneasy look until now, unable to join the circle surrounding Rio. But she couldn't overlook Aishia hugging Rio from behind.

"Stop! Don't press those excessive lumps of fat against Master Rio's back!"

Sora forced herself into the circle surrounding Rio and tried to yank Aishia away by force. Her dragonkin form was already lifted, so she looked no different from a little girl right now.

"Haruto needs support right now."

"Then Sora will do it!"

"You're not tall enough."

"Sora has more strength than you, so Sora is the most qualified!"

Sora and Aishia argued noisily; everyone else watched Sora curiously. The residents of the mansion had met her before. Celia had once brought her to stay with them for a few days. The rules of god had removed those memories from the residents of the mansion, but they could remember everything right now.

However, Sora only joined Rio's journey after everyone lost their memories of him, which was why no one knew what relationship she had with Rio and Aishia. It was only natural for them to feel curious.

Just then, Sora noticed all the attention on her. She wasn't used to being in the center of attention and quickly hid beside Rio.

"Wh-What's with all of you? Don't look at Sora."

"It really is you, Sora! Do you remember me?" Latifa asked, staring into Sora's face.

"Huh? S-So what if Sora does?" Sora said sharply out of shyness.

"I remember too! It's so nice seeing you again!" Latifa grinned and clung to Sora tightly.

"Wh-What are you doing?! L-Let go! Release Sora!" Sora screeched,

wriggling and squirming.

"Ahaha, stop struggling."

"H-Hey! Don't lift Sora! Stop treating Sora like a child!"

It would've been easy for Sora to break free with her strength, but she didn't attempt to force her way free. Her lack of resistance suggested that she was either holding back out of thoughtfulness, or she didn't actually hate it that much.

"Hehe. Good for you, Sora," Celia said with a smile. She was referring to Sora making new friends.

"How so?!"

And so, Sora immediately adapted to the circle. The noisy commotion brought back memories for Rio, who chuckled in amusement.

"Ahahaha."

Thanks to that, he finally regained the energy to walk on his own again. He stepped away from Latifa and Aishia, supporting himself with his own feet.

Hmm?

Rio reached up to his chest to put his mask away when he recalled something.

Come to think of it, wasn't I stabbed earlier?

During the earlier battle, the golem had pierced right through his heart. But there was no hole in Rio's body. In fact, there wasn't even a hole in his clothes.

"What's wrong, Onii-chan? Are you still feeling bad?" Latifa asked worriedly, staring into Rio's face.

Rio shook his head slowly. "No, I'm fine. I should go greet the king. See you in a bit."

He approached King Francois.

"You've done well," Francois said warmly, welcoming Rio back with a smile.

"I'm sorry I couldn't greet you earlier."

Rio placed a hand against his chest and started to bow his head respectfully, but—

"No need for that. You may stand at ease. You can even lie down if you need," Francois said jokingly.

"Thank you for the consideration, but I'll be fine like this. There are many things I need to inform you about," Rio said with a wry smile, wondering where to start.

"I'm sure there are. Let's find somewhere to talk in the castle—no, in your

mansion.”

“Thank you very much.”

Just then, Miharu descended from the sky, wings of light extending from her back like an angel. She landed near Rio and the wings disappeared.

“Miharu?!”

“Just where have you been this whole time?”

Sara and the others ran over to her while shouting questions. They had watched her use magic she shouldn’t have been able to use to fend off the golem before vanishing through teleportation magic, so it was only natural for them to be curious.

Miharu? Or is that Lina?

Rio tilted his head.

Miharu ignored everyone else and marched straight up to Rio. She slowed down a little once she was right before him.

“Huh?!”

With a charming smile, she clung to Rio without saying anything. Rio and everyone else watching were startled, but that was just the beginning of their surprise.

“Wha...?!” Miharu beckoned Rio’s face closer, then stood on tiptoe to kiss him. Rio froze in wide-eyed shock—a kiss was the last thing he had expected.

“Ngh...!” When he felt Miharu’s tongue slip into his mouth, he quickly tried to back away. But Miharu’s arms were firmly wrapped around his neck, refusing to let go. On top of that, Rio still wasn’t in top condition and couldn’t muster any strength.

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“Wh-Wh-What...”

While everyone else was frozen in astonishment, Miharu continued to make a show of kissing him passionately. Eventually, the light disappeared from Miharu’s eyes.

“Wh-What?!” Everyone yelled, unable to keep up with the situation.

Immediately after, light returned to Miharu’s eyes.

“Huh...?” Miharu tilted her head in confusion, lips still attached to Rio’s.

Haruto?

Like everyone else, she clearly remembered who Rio was.

So warm...

His face was oddly close. Was she dreaming? *He really has a pretty face*, she thought in a daze. However...

“Hmm? Huh?”

Eventually, Miharu realized she wasn’t in a dream and moved her mouth. With that, she finally noticed that she was hugging and kissing Rio.

And not just a regular kiss—a deep one.

Huh?! Why?! What?!

That had been her first kiss...

Well, she had kissed Haru-kun before when she was a kid, but...

She was in a complete panic. Multiple thoughts flashed through her head one after another until her mind went completely blank.

Sometimes, when people become confused to the extreme, they forget to avoid the immediate situation. That was the state Miharu was currently in. She remained in the kiss with Rio, unsure what to do, frozen as her face turned bright red.

“Wh-Whoa. Miharu’s an adult...” Masato mumbled in awe, blushing as well.

“Sh-Shut up, stupid!” Aki covered his eyes to stop him from looking. However, she looked a little conflicted at Rio and Miharu’s kiss.

The last time Aki had met Rio was during the banquet. And right now, she knew that Rio was Amakawa Haruto in his past life. It was only natural to feel all kinds of bitter feelings even in this situation.

The others around them gradually unfroze one after another.

“Miharu?!”

“Miharu!”

“Ayase Miharu!”

They all yelled Miharu’s name.

Chapter 6: Untrustworthy Prophet

After the battle with the golems was over, the group relocated from the rooftop garden of the Galarc Castle to Rio's mansion on the castle grounds. Francois stayed back at the castle to give his retainers orders before joining them at the mansion.

Thus, a meeting was arranged to discuss everything.

There were two main topics: what happened at the end of the battle with Saint Erica, and why did everyone forget about Rio and Aishia?

However, there were many unclear aspects of the rules of god. Considering how Rio himself didn't know the exact reason the memories of him were restored, he decided it would be best to restrict their talk to merely the sharing of information.

And so, the information would only be conveyed to the residents of the mansion, King Francois, Liselotte, and Aria. They were the ones who had been present during the battle with Saint Erica. King Francois would then decide how much of that information he would pass on to Christina and Lilianna, who weren't part of the Galarc Kingdom.

At any rate, Rio emphasized the need for utter confidentiality before giving a similar explanation to what he gave Celia before, keeping only a select few secrets.

In short, he explained how he used a transcendent power to defeat Saint Erica, how those who use the transcendent powers become subject to the rules of god and lose the right to engage with the people of the world, and how his power could only be used for the benefit of the entire world, or else the people involved will lose their memories of him. He also told them about how Sora came to become his disciple.

"And that is why everyone lost their memories," Rio concluded.

Latifa and the others all fell silent with pained looks on their faces. They had just learned that their peaceful days in the castle were built upon someone else's sacrifice, so it was only natural for them to feel like their chests were about to burst.

"The thing that attacked the castle is called a golem, a weapon developed by

the Wise Gods during the era of the Divine War. I don't know why they attacked the castle, but Miharu should know something about them—and why everyone's memories returned..."

Rio trailed off and looked at Miharu.

"I'm sorry... I don't have any memory after going to bed last night," Miharu said, bowing her head apologetically.

In fact, she appeared to be awfully embarrassed as she looked down. She was still feeling embarrassed about kissing Rio without her own knowledge.

"The Wise God Lina was probably controlling Miharu's body then. Your memories returned to you after the barrier surrounding the capital appeared, right?" Rio asked, awkwardly looking away from Miharu to question Celia, who was the one who activated the barrier with Lina.

"There's no doubt about that," Celia agreed. She then added with a frown, "But all I did was follow Lina's orders, so I don't know how the barrier works either. I was returned to the castle before it was complete, so I don't know how to get back to that place either."

"I see... All this talk about the Dragon King and Wise Gods reincarnating is hard to believe, but I understand. I never expected a place like that to exist beneath the castle," Francois said. He sighed heavily and fell silent in thought.

"Onii-chan," Latifa suddenly said.

"Hm?"

"What are you going to do now...?" she asked, staring into Rio's face anxiously. She was probably worried he would leave again.

"If allowed, I'd like to live with everyone here. It seems the rules of god don't apply within this barrier, so I'd like to continue this lifestyle, even if it's just for now," Rio said humbly.

He wanted to live as Rio and Haruto, not as a transcendent one.

"Of course! It doesn't have to be just for now! Let's live together forever! Don't go anywhere!" Latifa shouted in a fret, spurred by the vague fear of Rio vanishing again.

"Forever might be difficult," Rio said after a pause, shaking his head slowly.

"What?! Why?!"

"I... The man named Haruto before you right now is probably an unstable existence. We don't know how long the barrier can maintain its effect. You may lose all your memories of me again by tomorrow."

Rio clearly voiced his current situation out loud. It was a difficult thing to say, but he knew that everyone needed to hear it.

Latifa wasn't the only one who reacted. Everyone in the room had looks of intense fear and panic on their faces.

"It might not end up that way, but it'd be scary to have a stranger suddenly appear in your house, no?" Rio added jokingly, sensing the change in atmosphere.

"It's not scary! Onii-chan isn't scary! If I forget again... I'll write a diary every day! I'll write as many pages as I have to every single day so I won't forget you again!" Latifa said, explaining her plan for preventing memory loss.

"It'd be better not to do that. If there's any striking contradiction between your memories and your records, the rules will activate—and there's no telling what kind of burden that will place on your brain. At best, you'll just have a vague feeling of something missing..."

There was no telling what would actually happen until the rules activated. Rio warned Latifa against doing anything that could result in trouble.

"Why? Why would you say that, Onii-chan? You're right here in front of me..."

Tears flowed from Latifa's eyes and she started wailing at the top of her lungs.

"Suzune..." Liselotte, who was sitting beside Latifa, quietly hugged her.

"Let's end the talk here," Francois said, standing up from his seat.

"My apologies."

"No, I've heard everything I wanted to hear for now. I'd like some time to think things over, so let us meet again on another—no, it'd be better not to assume there'll be another day. But at this moment right now, the man named Haruto has definitely returned home. Rejoice in that together."

"Yes." Rio nodded, considering Francois's advice carefully.

"I suggest you host a lunch banquet after this. I will attend too. I'll extend the invitation to Princess Christina and Princess Lilianna when I update them on the situation."

"Thank you very much."

Rio stood up and bowed his head at Francois. With that, they wrapped up the talk for the day—when Satsuki entered the dining room.

"Hi, did you just finish talking?" She was accompanied by her guards and those assigned to nursing her. They were Gouki's servants from the Yagumo region.

"Satsuki!"

"Are you better already?!" Everyone ran up to Satsuki worriedly.

“Yeah, I’m all better now. I don’t feel any different from before I was injured,” she said, flexing her right arm to show off her recovery. “More importantly...”

She spotted Rio among those in the room.

“Wow, it really is Haruto...” she muttered, blinking before approaching him.

“Long time no see, Satsuki.”

“Yup. I heard you were the one who protected us. Thank you.”

It seemed she had heard the general gist of things from those looking after her. Satsuki smiled happily as she thanked Rio.

Rio shook his head with a bitter expression. “No, I was unable to protect you. I’m sorry I was late.”

“Don’t apologize. If you didn’t come, I would have died along with everyone else. I’m the one who should apologize for forgetting you.”

“You didn’t have a choice... I should explain things properly to you too.”

“Yeah, tell me. But that aside...”

Satsuki looked over at Latifa. Latifa’s eyes were red from crying so much, and that was clear to Satsuki too.

“Haruto, did you make Suzune cry?” she asked, sending Rio an accusatory glare.

“Huh? No, that’s not what I...”

“Tell me everything from the beginning.”

Satsuki grinned teasingly and approached Rio as he recoiled. Thus, Rio ended up repeating everything he’d said to Satsuki as well.

◇ ◇ ◇

Around noon, Christina, Flora, Hiroaki, Roanna, Kouta, Rei, and Lilianna had been invited to the banquet in the mansion’s dining room.

Latifa was clinging closely to Rio. She’d been that way ever since the talk ended.

“Hey, Suzune! You’ve been glued to the Dra—Master Haruto’s side ever since the battle ended! Sora overlooked it earlier, but that’s enough! Give him some space!”

Sora attempted to tear Latifa away from Rio. She had overlooked Latifa’s behavior earlier out of empathy for her, but it seemed she had reached the limits of her envy.

“No, I don’t want to! Why don’t you just cling to him too? See, his other arm

is free.”

“Wh-Wh-What?! Sora would never do something so insolent...!” Sora said with a blush.

“Then I’ll do it,” Aishia said, entwining her arm around Rio’s.

“Aishia! Y-You! Move it! That’s Sora’s spot...!”

Everyone surrounded Rio noisily.

But there were some people who chose not to join that circle. For example, Miharu, who had retreated to a corner of the room to avoid notice, as she didn’t want to face Rio.

“Say, Miharu, did something happen? You’re very obviously avoiding Haruto.”

Satsuki, who had sensed that love in the air, approached Miharu to question her curiously.

“Hehe.”

Celia was also a short distance away from the lively group surrounding Rio, watching over them happily.

Her mother, Monica, walked up to her. “What a lovely gentleman he is,” she said.

“Mother...”

“Are you sure you don’t want to join the others with him?”

“Yes. I’ll let everyone else have their turn this time. I was able to remember him before everyone else, after all.”

Celia watched Rio and the others with a look of fondness and smiled softly.

“I see. But if you do that, when will you be able to introduce me to him?”

“Huh?”

“I want to be introduced to your beloved one.”

Indeed, Monica had left with Christina and Flora after the battle to avoid intruding on their talk. Since Rio had been surrounded by Latifa and the others since then, she was yet to meet him properly.

“R-Right. So many things happened, I forgot. I should introduce you. B-But my beloved one isn’t quite correct...”

Celia blushed and turned away from Monica.

“Hehe, I just want to give my greetings already. Go on,” Monica said, happily urging Celia to hurry.

And so, the two made their way over to Rio.

“Say, Haruto,” Celia said.

“Hi Celia. Who’s this?”

With Latifa, Aishia, and Sora latched on to him, Rio replied to Celia.

“I’m late in introducing you, but this is my mother.”

“Your mother? Pardon my rudeness. Let go of me, everyone.”

Rio, who had been troubled by his inability to move, took the chance to free himself from the three. He then faced Monica and bowed with his right hand over his chest.

“I’m Celia’s mother, Monica Claire. My daughter has been truly indebted to you.”

Monica pinched the hem of her skirt and greeted him elegantly.

“I apologize for my delayed greeting. I’m Haruto Amakawa. I’m the one who’s been indebted to your daughter.”

“No no, I’m the one who was late in introducing myself. I’ve been living in your mansion for a few days now.”

“I see.”

Monica bowed her head. “I apologize if I’ve caused any inconvenience.”

“It isn’t a problem at all, you’re most welcome here, mother. Feel free to stay as long as you need,” Rio said, shaking his head.

“Oh my... Mother? I’m happy to hear that,” Monica said, placing a hand over her mouth.

“Ah, no, that’s not what I...”

“M-Mother! Stop!”

Rio’s and Celia’s voices overlapped with each other.

“You’re strong, handsome, reliable, kind, and I can see why you’re adored by the children of the mansion. I could even see in Celia’s eyes when she was looking at you earlier...” Monica said excitedly, like a maiden that loved to gossip about love.

Realizing it would be dangerous to let her continue, Celia pushed Monica in the back.

“M-Mother?! H-Haruto, I have something to discuss with my mother, so we’ll excuse ourselves now!” she said, forcing Monica to leave with her.

“Haruto, please look after my daughter eternally. Don’t worry about her nagging father. I’m sure she’s in safe hands with you,” Monica said pleasantly before leaving.

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“M-Mother! Jeez!” Celia shrieked in horror.

Her mother gave her blessings... How nice...

There were girls in the room who might or might not have been thinking that.

◇ ◇ ◇

After the banquet, Rio invited Francois, Christina, and Lilianna to a meeting room of the mansion.

“My apologies for calling you all here when you must be tired. There’s something I wanted to discuss with the three of you,” Rio said once the three of them sat down; he took a seat as well. He had called the king of a major nation and the first princesses of the neighboring kingdoms here; that alone told everyone how important this discussion would be.

“Is it about the heroes?” Francois guessed bluntly.

“I see you’ve noticed,” Rio said.

In the talk they had immediately after the battle, Rio had purposefully hid the information he had about the heroes and upper high rank spirits.

“I remembered some things when I regained my memories of Saint Erica. That, and the heroes are one thing our three nations have in common. Speak freely,” Francois said, explaining his guess and encouraging Rio to speak.

“Then to get straight to the point: the heroes are in danger of losing control over their powers,” Rio said frankly.

A silence fell over them for a considerable moment. Rather than giving a reaction, they seemed to be waiting for him to continue.

“The heroes are in a state of assimilation with the six most powerful upper high rank spirits of this world. They have a contract with those spirits, which allows them to borrow their strength and use their abilities in the form of Divine Arms. And as you might have realized already, they do not die even when they are mortally wounded.”

Rio paused there for a moment, then continued.

“However, the upper high rank spirits have actually been sealed within the heroes against their will. If given the chance, they *will* attempt to take over the hero’s body,” he said with emphasis.

Having one’s body taken over was definitely a serious matter. Francois, Christina, and Lilianna all looked shocked.

“The seal placed on them is powerful and cannot be broken easily. But the more power a hero draws from their spirit, the greater their assimilation with

their spirit becomes, increasing their risk of being taken over."

"And that is what happened to Saint Erica?" Francois asked, foreseeing the conclusion.

"Yes. Saint Erica was taken over by the upper high rank spirit of earth and caused a natural disaster. That was the power of the rampaging upper high rank spirit. When a hero falls that far, they can no longer be stopped by mere human strength." Rio looked at the three representatives of the heroes as he warned them of the dangers.

"Princess Christina and I weren't there at the time. What was the extent of the natural disaster she created?" Lilianna asked.

"Hmm. Let me think. It was like the earth had flipped over, forming a wave large enough to swallow the capital. And it continued all the way to the horizon," Francois said, recalling what he saw during the battle with Saint Erica.

Christina shuddered. "That sounds very unsettling."

"I don't know what exactly triggers the loss of control over a hero's power either, but Saint Erica fought under the premise of being able to use her resurrection ability to withstand fatal wounds over and over again," Rio explained. "That ended up enhancing her assimilation with the spirit, allowing him to take over her body. Two or three times didn't seem to be a problem, but it may vary on an individual level. That's why you should avoid letting the heroes die by all means possible. I arranged this meeting today to tell you that."

Once he finished speaking, Rio bowed his head deeply at the three representatives.

"Of course. I was there too, after all. I saw exactly how that power was beyond the reach of humanity," Francois answered immediately.

"I have no objections either," Christina agreed.

Lilianna nodded. "I am also in agreement."

"Thank you all very much. You all have your own relationships with the heroes to consider, so I avoided mentioning this in the earlier talk. I'm also a little unsure if they should be informed of this immediately, if I'm being honest..."

Rio frowned with a look of uncertainty. It wasn't easy to tell someone their body could be taken over and used to create a natural disaster. At best, they could have a panic attack, and at worst, they could end up self-destructive like Saint Erica.

Even so, they couldn't keep it hidden forever.

"They should be informed, yes... I would prefer to inform Lady Satsuki with

you present, if possible," Francois said.

"I would also like to ask you to be there for me and Sir Masato, as he trusts you greatly."

While it was undecided whether Masato would be part of Galarc or Centostella, Lilianna also requested Rio's presence as an interested party.

"In that case, I would like to request the same. Please be there for Sir Hiroaki as well," Christina echoed, agreeing that Hiroaki should be informed too.

"Then I shall arrange a meeting for the four of us and the three heroes on another day," Francois said in conclusion.

Rio bowed his head. "Thank you."

"I should be the one saying that. Thank you for informing us," Francois said firmly. "With that settled, there was one thing I was wondering..." He suddenly changed the topic.

"What is it?"

"You were also using a sword that resembled the Divine Arms of the heroes. What was that? Up until I regained my memories, I assumed you were also a hero..."

"Naturally, I am not a hero. That sword is a result of my assimilation with my spirit, Aishia. It essentially works in the same way as the heroes' Divine Arms, but since I'm not assimilated with Aishia right now, I can't bring the sword out," Rio said, explaining how the Spirit Arms worked.

"I see... So it's a similar power to the heroes. But in your case, there seems to be no danger of losing control of your power..."

"Yes, because Aishia would never try to take over me." Rio chuckled softly, having never considered that possibility until now.

"No doubt about that." Francois laughed with him.

"But is your body all right? You seemed to be in great pain after the battle..." Christina said, worrying for Rio's health.

"Yes, I've completely recovered," Rio replied brightly.

"Even so, you must be very tired. We're done talking for today, so please go and rest well."

Francois also expressed concern for Rio before getting up from his seat. Lilianna also stood up with a smile. Rio also stood up to see them out.

"Um, Sir Amakawa..."

Christina called out to him after getting up from her seat as well. It seemed she still had something to discuss.

"No need to send us off. We'll leave first by ourselves."

Francois realized that as well, and he excused himself from the room first with Lilianna. Thus, Rio and Christina were left alone.

“Is something the matter?” Rio asked, turning to face her.

“I’d like to express my gratitude.”

“For what, exactly?” Rio tilted his head in confusion.

“For the events that happened when Rodania fell. It was you who saved us when we were trying to escape, no?”

“Oh, that...”

Back then, Renji had used the Divine Arms of ice to devastate the defense force of Rodania, allowing Duke Arbor’s fleet of enchanted airships to descend on the city.

Without Rio, Christina wouldn’t have been able to escape from the fallen city; she would have been captured and brought back to the Beltrum Castle. Their escape was only made possible with Rio’s help.

“If you hadn’t intervened, I wouldn’t be here right now. Thank you very much.” Christina bowed her head deeply.

“No, I’m sorry I wasn’t able to prevent the fall of Rodania entirely...”

The restrictions of the transcendent ones had kept him from doing so. Rio shook his head apologetically.

“That doesn’t matter. You spent one of your valuable masks to protect us, didn’t you? I can’t even compensate you with another...”

“I did it of my own accord, and I still have spares, so don’t worry,” Rio said, uttering his usual words of reassurance.

But Christina only frowned further, unable to face him. “I was living a carefree life with no idea of what you did for us... I don’t know how I could ever make up for this.”

“It was only natural for you to lose your memories, and even without the rules, it would be fine if you forget about it. I honestly don’t mind.”

Rio tried to brush aside the matter lightly, but—

“No. I know I am all but powerless here, having sought asylum in Galarc. But if there is anything I can do for you, just say the word. I wish to repay you however I can.”

Christina didn’t back down easily either. She stepped forward and told him her feelings.

“In that case, please visit the mansion for lunch again sometime.”

“That isn’t a form of repayment...” she said, taken aback by how unrelated Rio’s request was to her repayment.

“No no, it will make everyone happy. Including myself, of course.” Rio scratched his cheek shyly.

“I...see...” Christina watched him quietly. She knew that his second sentence was just diplomatic flattery, but...

“Then may I come visit again someday soon? F-For fun, not business...”

Was it because she didn’t want to let it end as just flattery? Christina looked a little embarrassed as she asked her question.

“Of course, you’re most welcome here,” Rio replied immediately.

“The soonest I can manage would be tomorrow evening... No, that would be *too* soon. It’d probably cause more trouble for everyone if I came in the evening, so maybe...”

It was rare to see Christina’s thoughts unable to keep up with her words like that. She was so flustered, her mouth moved before she could think, making her stutter over a simple promise to visit for fun.

“Sure. Let’s make it tomorrow evening, so you can join us for dinner. It’s decided,” Rio promised firmly.

“Ah, okay. Then I’ll see you tomorrow evening...” Christina muttered in a daze.

Thus, with the promise to meet up again made, the two went their separate ways.

◇ ◇ ◇

While Rio was speaking with Francois and the others in the meeting room, Miharu was in her bed. It wasn’t evening yet, but her face was buried in her pillow.

“Uuuh... Uuugh!”

She kicked her feet and moaned as she vented her embarrassment to her pillow. In the end, she hadn’t been able to say anything to Rio during the banquet. She couldn’t even look at him directly.

I have so much I want to say to him too... But because of what happened...

Miharu touched her own lips.

That was my first kiss!

She never thought she’d have it without her own awareness. Well, she woke up in the middle of it, so she did get to experience some of it. At any rate...

“Ugh!”

Because she recalled the kiss, her face turned bright red once again. It felt

like the kiss still lingered on her lips.

It was so soft... I mean, no!

What she wanted to know was *why* she had ended up kissing him.

Lina was controlling my body, right?

Honestly, she had no realization of that herself. When she was told that one of the Wise Gods worshipped in this world was her past life, she had no idea what that actually meant. But that was a natural reaction to have.

Right now, Miharu's embarrassment over her kiss was far more important to her, and she didn't have the room to think about anything else. And yet, when she looked back on it now, she realized there was something familiar about this situation.

She's that person in my dreams, isn't she?

Miharu had recently dreamed of being in a white space with a woman she had never seen before. In that dream, that woman would say things about the future, as though she knew what would happen.

If I fall asleep, will I be able to meet her?

Miharu had met that person in her dreams a total of two times. To be more precise, she had also seen her a third time after she had slapped Takahisa, but she was unable to keep her memories of that.

In that case...

She didn't feel sleepy at all, but she lay still in her bed anyway. Even if she wasn't tired, her body that had been activating large-scale sorcery against the golems since early morning was exhausted.

Which was why it didn't take that long for Miharu to fall asleep.

◇ ◇ ◇

Before she knew it, Miharu was standing in a pure white space.

"Wha...?!"

It was that dream! Miharu immediately whipped her head around to look at her surroundings. There was no one else to be seen, but—

"Good morning. Or would it be better to say good evening?" a woman's voice said out of nowhere.

"Are you Lina of the Seven Wise Gods?" Miharu asked, getting straight to the point. She had something important to say today.

"Getting right to it, I see. Sure, let's go with that. I am Lina." Lina easily revealed who she was.

“Um! I don’t think you should be using other people’s bodies to kiss people.” Although she had a point, it was rare for Miharu to scold someone so firmly.

“Out of all the things we could be talking about, you want to start with something so trivial first?” Lina said, giggling.

“I-It’s important to me!” After all, it had been her first kiss.

“It was with someone you loved, so what does it matter?”

“It matters a lot! It’s *because* I like him that I wanted...my first kiss...” Miharu mumbled, trailing off.

She had wanted to have a proper first kiss with him. Now that the aspiration she yearned for could never come true, Miharu objected with embarrassment.

“What are you talking about? That wasn’t even your first kiss.”

“I-It *was* my first kiss! How would you know anyway? What are you to me?” Miharu was rarely this emotional.

“I know your first kiss was with Amakawa Haruto, when you were seven years old and Amakawa Haruto was about to move away.”

“Th-That was a kiss with Haru-kun, not...!”

“So you *do* remember. That’s right, today wasn’t your first kiss with him. The kiss today was your second kiss. So I fail to understand why you keep going on and on about your silly first kiss.”

“‘S-Silly’...” Miharu pouted in spite of herself.

“Well, you’ve already given your first kiss to Amakawa Haruto. You can only give Rio your second kiss onwards. So why... Oh, is it because you’re feeling sorry you can’t give your first to Rio instead?” Lina asked in realization, but it was clear from her tone that she was teasing Miharu.

“Guh...!” Miharu bit her lip. Anger filled her eyes and she looked like she wanted to argue with Lina, but she held her tongue. There was a part of her that knew she couldn’t deny all of Lina’s words.

Indeed, Miharu’s first kiss was with Amakawa Haruto. That’s why today’s kiss was actually her second one. But just because it wasn’t her first kiss didn’t mean she didn’t care... Although it wasn’t because she felt sorry over being unable to give him her first kiss or anything...

Miharu’s thoughts went around and around in loops. The possibility of Lina making her think about that on purpose didn’t even occur to her.

“After all, you’re not the sharpest tool in the shed.”

“Huh?” Miharu’s head snapped up.

“I don’t really get it myself, but human men are happier when they take their partner’s firsts, right? They seem to place value on the fact they’re the first, and

consider any woman who's had their firsts to be dirtied. I wonder if he's the same? Maybe he wanted his first kiss to be with someone who hadn't kissed before too. Not with a woman who's had their first kiss," Lina said in an innocent voice, exaggerating her words in order to plant a sense of inferiority in Miharu.

Miharu fell silent, unable to deny anything.

"That aside, I have something I want to ask you as well," Lina said, suddenly changing the topic.

"What is it?" Miharu replied sluggishly, unable to keep up with her thoughts.

"Is the person you like Amakawa Haruto, or is it Rio?" Lina asked directly.

For some reason, that question felt like a sharp shovel digging into Miharu's heart.

◇ ◇ ◇

While Miharu was sleeping, Rio had wrapped up his meeting with Francois and the princesses and was on his way back to his own room in the mansion. He stopped before the door.

It feels like it's been a long time since I've entered this room.

With a hand on the doorknob, Rio was immersed in sentimentality.

"Um..." someone called out to him.

"Miharu?"

Sure enough, it was her. Rio looked a little awkward as he recalled their kiss earlier today.

"I have something to talk to you about. Something I don't want other people to hear..."

Miharu's cheeks reddened in her usual Miharu-like way. It was clear from her attitude that she was still feeling the embarrassment of kissing him.

"All right. Please come in." Rio scratched his cheek awkwardly and opened the door to his room.

"E-Excuse me..." Miharu said nervously, entering his room.

"So what did you want to talk about? You can have a seat here."

Rio followed her in and closed his door. He then moved one of his chairs and went to sit down on his bed, when Miharu hugged Rio from behind.

"Huh?!" Rio was startled.

"Um, I...!" Miharu pushed Rio down on the bed. She then turned him over to face her and leaned in as though they were about to be intimate.

“Wait, please,” Rio said calmly.

Miharu froze.

“You’re Lina, aren’t you?” Rio asked hesitantly.

“So you noticed after all.”

Miharu—no, Lina ceased her act and giggled in amusement. She then reached up to touch her earring. It probably had transformation sorcery in it, as her appearance changed from Miharu to Lina.

Rio’s eyes widened in surprise at her change in appearance, but he quickly drew back his emotions. Was this Lina’s original appearance? Such questions flashed through his mind, but—

“Miharu would never do something like this... Why would you do this?” Rio said, sighing.

“Who knows? Why do you think I would?” Lina tilted her head mischievously, unmoving from above Rio.

“I’d prefer it if you didn’t answer a question with a question...”

“You shouldn’t expect an answer to every question you have.”

“That’s true. For now, please get off of me.”

“No.” Lina beamed from ear to ear as she refused him.

Rio didn’t bother asking why. Instead, he considered what her possible goals could be.

“No need to be so cautious. It’s not like I’m trying to attack you in your sleep...since you’re not asleep yet. But I really didn’t come to attack you—unless you want me to, anyway. I can even return to Miharu’s face if you want. I’m sure she’ll be happy when she wakes up anyway—‘fait accompli’ and all that. Interested?” Lina smiled alluringly, pulling down her clothes to reveal more of her cleavage.

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“If you didn’t come to attack me, let’s talk properly,” Rio said with another sigh, not falling for Lina’s seduction.

“Oh, you mean you wouldn’t mind if I actually came to attack you?”

“If you actually came to attack me, I would resist.” Rio sighed again.

“That’s a lie.”

“It’s not. I would struggle,” Rio said tiredly.

“Your body hurts, doesn’t it? You may be enduring it by enhancing your physical body, but without that enchantment, you’d be too exhausted to walk. It’s a side effect of using transcendent power and assimilation,” Lina pointed out.

Rio looked surprised.

“This is a warning. Assimilation that crosses a hundred percent shouldn’t be used consecutively or for long periods of time. Ignoring this warning will be a one-way road.”

He would be unable to return to being a human, is what she meant. “I see. You came to tell me that.”

“No, that’s just the preamble, and I’m not done with it yet. With regards to the barrier surrounding the capital: it’s currently in a stable condition, so there shouldn’t be a problem. You can live within the barrier without worrying about the rules of god. I’ve removed the wall effect of the barrier, so people can come and go freely, but be aware that the rules of god still apply outside. Bring your mask with you,” Lina added.

“All right.”

“And now, for the main topic at hand.”

“Yes?”

It was a little awkward to have her face right in front of his, but Rio looked her straight in the eyes as he replied.

“I don’t want you to rely on my power of foresight, so I’m going to say this now. I’ve told Celia this already, but I cannot directly inform you of the future to come. I can only give advice or prophecy-like statements. There will be times when I won’t even do that, and times when I lie too. I may even say horrible things on purpose.”

“For your own reasons?”

“Yes. But at the end of the day, you’re the one making the decisions. You don’t have to follow my words exactly. I may ask you to do something you’ll hate me for, and you’re the one bearing all the responsibility for whatever happens.”

“You’re quite the untrustworthy prophet,” Rio said with a wry smile.

“That’s right. The Wise God Lina is an untrustworthy and cruel goddess. Do you get why Sora hates me now?”

“Maybe.”

“You really are kind, aren’t you? In this life, and in your last...”

“I’m not sure about that either.” Rio’s smile grew more strained.

“Well, that doesn’t matter. Now, with that out of the way...” Lina paused for a long moment.

“Yes?” Rio tilted his head, encouraging her to continue.

“Even though I’m an untrustworthy prophet, are you willing to listen to my words? Will you believe in me no matter what happens from here?” Lina said seriously, staring straight into Rio’s eyes. She sat up and held out her hand for a handshake.

“To be honest, I don’t think that’s a question I can respond to immediately.” Rio didn’t move his hand. He had only just met Lina, and he didn’t know enough about her to decide whether she was trustworthy or not. “...But I can vow to at least listen to what you have to say. You’re the greatest source of information I have, and you did save everyone.”

He had already come this far. He strengthened his resolve and shook Lina’s hand.

“I see. Then from now on, we’re partners. Let’s get along.” Lina smiled with satisfaction, shaking his hand back.

“I agree. But if you’re going to give your advice, I’d prefer it if you didn’t do it through jokes like this.”

“Jokes like what?”

“Pushing me down like this while pretending to be Miharu.” Rio sighed tiredly.

“Oh, it’s not entirely meaningless, you know? This was the most efficient way of showing you how untrustworthy I can be.”

“Don’t tell me you did this just for that? And that kiss too?”

“Convincing, isn’t it?” Lina grinned flirtatiously.

“Please do not do this again.” Rio let out one more heavy sigh.

“Now, as new collaborators, I have three pieces of untrustworthy advice for you. That can also be counted as prophecies, if you want.” She held up three fingers while giggling.

“What are they?”

“First, searching the labyrinth for clues to what happened a thousand years

ago is pointless. If you're going to look, you should search elsewhere."

"Where exactly should I be looking if not the labyrinth?" Rio asked.

"I can't answer that," Lina said curtly.

"I see. What's the second thing?"

Wouldn't that make my search range the entire continent, making it impossible to find? Rio thought, but he asked for the next piece of advice instead.

"You should get more disciples besides Sora," Lina said, holding up two fingers.

Rio fell silent with a grimace. He was rather negative when it came to getting disciples, as becoming a disciple meant becoming a transcendent one. He didn't want anyone to be forgotten by the world.

"I understand why you don't want to get more disciples. A thousand years ago, he was the same as you—he hated forcing others to live like the transcendent ones. But even so, you should have more disciples besides Sora. Or you may end up regretting it."

"If I don't have more disciples, I'll regret it?"

From Rio's point of view, making more disciples was more likely to be a source of regret for him. What could possibly happen to make him think otherwise? He had a feeling Lina wouldn't tell him even if he asked, so he pondered the matter carefully.

"Now, for my last advice to you."

Then, Lina held up one finger.

"In my opinion, the first new disciple you should get is Christina Beltrum," she said, giving Rio the one piece of advice he was utterly unlikely to accept.

Afterword

Hello everyone, this is Yuri Kitayama. As always, thank you for picking up *Seirei Gensouki: Spirit Chronicles Volume 25 - Our Hero*.

And so, volume 25 has finally gone on sale. Looking back on things from the author's point of view, there were a lot of new revelations, and I remember struggling to depict the battles with the overpowered golems. What did you all think of it?

It'd be the greatest honor as an author if you all thought, "It was great! I want more!" after you read it.

As those of you who read to the end will know, at the end of this volume, a certain woman leaves a ticking time bomb in the very last scene that will affect future volumes. Whether that bomb goes off or not is a secret, but feel free to come up with your own theories on what happens.

While I'm at it, I'd like to add a little bit about volume 26 without spoiling the plot. Like the preview says, the subtitle will be *Where Fiction Lies*. It'll dramatically depict the daily life and relationship changes of Rio after the events of volume 25, and hopefully provide some answers to earlier foreshadowing... So please look forward to volume 26!

Furthermore, as announced on the official site, in 2024 the second season of the anime *Seirei Gensouki* will air! The official site and my own personal X account will continue to provide updates on that, so please look forward to it! As a fan of the anime *Seirei Gensouki* myself, I'm *really* excited, haha.

Finally, since there's still space left on the page, a little update on my recent affairs: I've been coming up with story ideas unrelated to *Seirei Gensouki* recently. The main reason for this was because I've been stuck in the routine of a single series for so long, I was worried it could lead to a drop in output quality.

Thanks to that, I was able to have a mental break and improve my writing for *Seirei Gensouki*. That doesn't mean I have the leisure to *actually* write a new series, but I've got a nice stockpile of interesting ideas now, so I hope I can share them with you all someday. And now I've run out of space, so I'll leave things at that.

See you all in volume 26!

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Yuri Kitayama
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Bonus Short Story

Precocious Kaguya-hime

In a hypothetical world where Amakawa Haruto was a second-year student at a Tokyo high school, the student council was putting on a charity show in collaboration with the drama club. As a member of the student council, Haruto and his friends were preparing to perform a new stage play.

The show was called *Kaguya-hime*. One day, an old bamboo cutter goes into the mountains to harvest bamboo and comes across a single shining bamboo stalk. He cuts it out of curiosity and finds a cute little girl inside. It was a play based on the famous Japanese folktale “The Tale of the Bamboo Cutter.”

It was a hot summer day in August during the school’s summer break, and Haruto and his friends were visiting the apartment Satsuki’s parents owned for a meeting about the *Kaguya-hime* play.

“Welcome. You’re the first to arrive, Haruto. The others should be here soon, so come on in,” Satsuki said.

“Pardon the intrusion.”

Just as Haruto stepped into the room, the doorbell rang.

“Speak of the devil.”

Endo Suzune, a student from the primary school affiliated with their high school, arrived next. She exchanged greetings with Satsuki through the intercom and waited for the automatic lock to open. A few minutes later, she entered Satsuki’s room as well.

“Hello, Satsuki, Haruto!” she said cheerfully, beaming with a carefree smile. There was another small girl who seemed to be in the lower primary years beside her.

“Welcome, Suzune. Is this the girl you wanted to introduce to us?” Satsuki turned to look at the other girl.

“Yup! I think she’s perfect for the role of Kaguya-hime! Her name is Sora. She transferred here before summer break started.”

“Yeah, she’s adorable. She should fit the outfit we’ve prepared perfectly,” Satsuki said brightly, looking at Sora with great curiosity.

“Wah...” Sora’s gaze was fixed on Haruto, who was beside Satsuki. She

seemed to be so enamored, her eyes were practically sparkling.

Haruto remained silent. It was his first time meeting her, so he was a little taken aback. He stood on the receiving end of Sora's gaze with an awkward smile.

"Not again, Haruto. What a sinner..." Satsuki sighed tiredly.

"Wait, what does that mean?" Haruto argued back.

"H-Hello! I'm Sora! It's an honor to meet you, Master Haruto!" Sora shouted, greeting him excitedly.

"*Master Haruto*?" Satsuki echoed, shooting Haruto an unimpressed look.

"Why are you looking at me? I didn't say it!"

"Hehe. Sora's been obsessed with Haruto ever since I told her about him! She didn't actually want to do the Kaguya-hime role at first." Suzune giggled in amusement.

"I see. But it looks like she's willing to take the role now."

"Master Haruto will be the old bamboo cutter, right?" Sora asked Satsuki.

"That's right."

"Then leave it to me! Sora will play the perfect daughter of Master Haruto!"

"Um, Haruto. What exactly did you do to this girl?" Her devotion to Haruto was so earnest, Satsuki glared at him with even more suspicion.

"I'd like to know myself!" Haruto protested in a near screech.

"Okay then, Sora. How about you change into the Kaguya-hime outfit right away and show Haruto? You'll look super cute," Satsuki said excitedly.

Sora's reply was immediate. "Okay!" she said, and they promptly started their changing session.

After that, Haruto waited alone in the living room while Satsuki took the girls to another room to change. The other stage play members like Miharu and Rikka arrived while he was waiting, and roughly ten minutes later...

"We're ready now!" Satsuki announced, returning to the living room with Sora and Suzune in tow.

"Wow..."

Everyone cheered in wonder at the sight of Sora in Kaguya-hime's kimono.

"H-How do I look?" Sora asked, fidgeting before Haruto with a blush.

"Great. You look very cute," Haruto said bashfully under everyone's watchful gaze...

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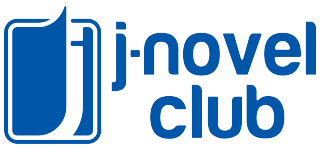

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by Yuri Kitayama

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